



PATIENT INFORMATION

ANAESTHETIC INFORMATION FOR PREGNANT WOMEN WITH A HIGH BODY MASS INDEX



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Who are Anaesthetists?

Anaesthetists are Doctors who work on the labour ward providing pain relief and anaesthetics for childbirth. They also work alongside Obstetric Doctors in the assessment and care of women with difficult pregnancies, or who become ill during pregnancy.

One of our aims is to identify those women who may need extra help with delivering their baby and therefore our services. One thing that makes this more likely is a high body mass index – BMI.

Body Mass Index and Pregnancy

This is your height to weight ratio and can be used to determine whether a person is underweight, overweight or obese. Your BMI will be recorded in your pregnancy notes and should be checked at least twice, at booking and in your third trimester (around 30 weeks).

Research shows that women who have a high BMI at the start of their pregnancy are at a higher risk of complications during their pregnancy and labour. For example, women with a BMI above 35 are twice as likely to need a caesarean section (and therefore an anaesthetic) compared to women whose BMI lies within the normal range of 20 – 25.

If your BMI is very high (above 45) or it is felt that you have other health problems you may be sent an appointment to see an Anaesthetist in the Antenatal Clinic during your pregnancy.

High Body Mass Index and Labour

As soon as you arrive on Delivery Suite you should ask the midwife looking after you to inform the Anaesthetist that you are here. Your Anaesthetist will then have the opportunity to introduce themselves and go over the Anaesthetic options for labour and delivery.

If labour is not straightforward you should think about having an epidural early during labour rather than later because it might take longer than usual to give you a spinal or epidural anaesthetic.

Your Anaesthetist may encourage you to have an epidural in labour so that if you needed a Caesarean section, it could be used to numb you completely and so possibly avoid the need for a general anaesthetic.

High Body Mass Index and Caesarean Section

In most cases it is better for you to have a regional anaesthetic for a caesarean section. This means an injection is given into your back (either by injection into the spine or through a tube placed in your back) to make the lower half of your body numb.

With a regional anaesthetic you stay awake during the operation. Being awake has many advantages for you and your baby during and after the operation.

There are times when we need to deliver a baby as quickly as possible. If you have an epidural during labour that is working well, we can often use it to deliver your baby either by caesarean section or if we need to deliver your baby using special equipment, for example, a forceps delivery.

High BMI and Anaesthetic Procedures

If you have a high BMI, this can make anaesthetic procedures more difficult. It may be harder to find the correct place to put the needle in to give you the anaesthetic and be more difficult to get the anaesthetic to work properly straight away.

A high BMI can make it more difficult to put a cannula (drip) in your hand and it may also cause problems with general anaesthesia (if we have to put you to sleep) during and after the procedure.

Summary

If your BMI is above 35, you are more likely to need some sort of help with the delivery of your baby than someone with a lower BMI.

- ✓ It is generally better to stay awake while your baby is delivered.
- ✓ Giving you a general anaesthetic may be more difficult than for women with a lower BMI, and the anaesthetic doctors need to plan for that.
- ✓ It can be more difficult and take longer to do epidurals and other injections in your back to make you numb. This means that it may be better to have an epidural early in labour in case we need to deliver your baby by caesarean section or by using special equipment as an emergency.
- ✓ When you go onto the labour ward to have your baby, tell the midwives that you need to see the Anaesthetist on duty.

If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PET@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Thursday from 8.30am to 4.30pm and Friday: 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that a voicemail service is in use at busy times, but messages will be returned as quickly as possible.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.