



**ANZCA National  
Anaesthesia Day**  
October 16, 2017



**ANZCA 25**  
CELEBRATING YEARS



## Ageing and anaesthesia

As we get older, we are more likely to need a procedure that may require anaesthesia.

While people aged 65 years or older make up about 15 per cent of Australia and New Zealand's population, they account for 41 per cent of hospital admissions in Australia and 30 per cent in New Zealand.

The natural ageing process can make us more sensitive to anaesthetic drugs, more likely to develop complications and infections, and older patients may take longer than younger ones to recover from anaesthesia.

In addition, as older patients we are more likely to have medical conditions that must be taken into account when considering the need to have an operation or anaesthesia.

If you are an older patient, some questions you might wish to discuss with your anaesthetist are:

### How do medical conditions and medications affect anaesthesia?

Older patients are more likely to be taking medications, some of which may react with anaesthetic drugs or they may have medical conditions that could be aggravated by anaesthesia. These might include:

- High blood pressure or heart disease.
- Kidney disease.
- Breathing problems or lung disease.
- Liver disease.
- Diabetes.
- Issues with memory and thinking.

### Will my memory and thinking be affected by anaesthesia?

The older you are, the more likely you are to suffer from post-operative confusion. However, if this happens, it is usually temporary – affecting fewer than 20 per cent of older patients for longer than three months after anaesthesia. In some very rare cases, deterioration may persist or worsen. This may be more obvious in patients who already had some cognitive decline before their anaesthesia.

### Is an operation the best option?

Anaesthetists are highly skilled at managing older, sick patients. However, an operation may not be the only option. The decision not to operate may in fact reflect the best possible care in some cases. Pain can often be managed without an operation so patients and their families should talk to their anaesthetist about the risks and benefits of an operation and anaesthesia compared with alternative treatment options.

### How can I prepare for my operation?

There are many things you can do such as stop smoking, improve your fitness and make sure you eat well.

**It is important to talk to your anaesthetist about your medications and any medical conditions that may affect your anaesthesia. Your anaesthetist will advise you on what is best for your individual situation.**

*Anaesthetists – caring for the body and its breath of life.*

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