

What to Know About Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

What Is ECT?

ECT, or “electroconvulsive therapy,” sends small amounts of electricity to your brain. ECT helps many people control their symptoms or illness.

During an ECT session, you will be asleep. You will not feel any pain during the session. Most people need 6-12 sessions of ECT. Some need fewer and some need more. You and your doctor will talk about how many sessions you need.

What Happens During an ECT Session?

- You will not have anything to eat 8 hours before ECT.
- We'll put a catheter (IV) in your arm. You'll get medicine through this catheter.
- We'll put monitoring sensors on your head and body. We'll also put blood pressure cuffs on your arm and leg.
- We'll give you anesthesia to make you sleep. We'll also give you medicine to relax your muscles.
- We'll send a controlled amount of electricity to your brain. This will cause a 1 minute seizure. Your body stays relaxed during the seizure.
- We'll carefully watch your heart, blood pressure, and brain waves.
- Within a few minutes after the seizure, you'll wake up. We'll watch you to make sure you're doing well until it's time to leave the ECT area.

How Can ECT Help Me?

ECT works differently for everyone. We expect that your illness will get better with ECT.

- You may recover fully, partly, or not at all.
- Your symptoms may come back soon after the treatment or long after the treatment.
- ECT works best when you're also taking medicine and getting psychotherapy. We will talk to you about your treatment options.



Questions? Call Us!

Our office (regular business hours):
505-272-0406

On the day of your session, you can call:
505-925-0204

Our fax number:
505-272-9843

Our address:

OSIS (Outpatient Surgery and Imaging Services)

1213 University Boulevard NE

Albuquerque, NM 87102

Risks and Side Effects of ECT

Like most medical treatments, ECT has side effects (problems that the treatment can cause) and risks.

Before you're given ECT, your doctor will make sure ECT is safe for you. Even after your doctor says ECT is safe, there are some possible risks and side effects.

Common Side Effects

These should go away with time:

- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Jaw pain
- Nausea
- Confusion (This usually goes away within 1 hour of an ECT session.)
- Memory loss and trouble paying attention (These problems should go away after you've finished all the ECT sessions.)

Less Common Side Effects

- Irregular heartbeat (This side effect usually goes away quickly. In rare cases it can be dangerous.)
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Seizures that are not part of ECT treatment
- Problems breathing
- Dental problems
- Broken or dislocated bones

ECT uses general anesthesia. Any time you're given general anesthesia, you have a very small risk of death.

The risk of death from ECT is very low. About 1 in 50,000 people who get ECT will die. If you have serious medical conditions, the risk of death is higher.

There are 2 Kinds of ECT:

Unilateral ECT: We will place electrodes on one side of your head.

Bilateral ECT: We will place electrodes on the right and left sides of your head.

Bilateral ECT is more likely to cause memory loss. For some people, bilateral ECT is still the best choice.

Talk to your doctor about which choice is best for you.

Memory Loss During ECT

During ECT, it's common to have trouble with your memory.

People getting ECT often have trouble remembering past events and learning new things. The more ECT treatments you have, the more memory loss you'll probably have.

Your memory loss will be the worst right after an ECT session.

As time passes, your memory will get better. In fact, most patients say they have a better memory after ECT than they did before their ECT sessions.

Planning Ahead

- ✘ Do not make important decisions while you're getting ECT, or right after you've finished the ECT course (usually 6-8 weeks of ECT sessions).
- ✘ Do not drive for 24 hours after each ECT treatment.
- ✘ Avoid things that will be hard or unsafe when you're having trouble with your memory.



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after each ECT treatment.

Cancelling a Session

ECT works best on a regular schedule. If you can't come to a session, please tell us at least 24 hours before your scheduled session.

We will stop your ECT sessions if you miss several sessions. This is for your safety.

- If you cancel 4 sessions during an ECT series, we will stop your ECT sessions.
- If you miss 2 sessions without letting us know you aren't coming, we will stop your ECT sessions.

Questions? Call Us!

You can ask your doctor or your ECT treatment team questions any time during or after your ECT course.

- Call our office at 505-272-0406.
- If you need to talk to us on the day of your ECT, call 505-925-0204.

If your insurance changes during your ECT course, tell us right away.



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