



Patient & Family Guide

2022

Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) for Outpatients

Colchester East Hants
Health Centre



www.nshealth.ca

Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) for Outpatients

What is electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)?

ECT is a treatment that uses a small electrical current to stimulate the brain and cause a mild seizure (twitching of your toes and jaw muscle). This treatment is very safe. Doctors and nurses will watch you closely during the treatment.

Why do I need ECT?

ECT is most often used to treat serious depression. Sometimes, it is helpful for mania, schizophrenia, Parkinson's disease, and some other disorders.

How does ECT work?

- Although there are several theories to explain how ECT works, the exact process is still not clear to health care professionals.
- We do know that it is a very useful treatment for people who are very depressed. This includes people who may be thinking about taking their own life, or those who are not doing well on anti-depressants. ECT usually works more quickly than medication.

- Most people who have ECT to treat depression feel a lot better than before their treatment.

Is ECT safe?

- Compared to many other health care treatments (like medication or having a tooth pulled), ECT is very safe. The chance of death with ECT is about the same as for minor surgery using general anesthetic (medicine that puts you to sleep).
- There are some side effects that will be explained on pages 4 and 5.
- Our ECT equipment is modern and up to date.

How is ECT given?

- About 1 week before starting your ECT treatments, you will meet with an ECT doctor. They will check your health records, including your recent lab test results, chest X-ray, and EKG (electrocardiogram).
- Your health care team may request other tests before you start treatment. This may be to check for any physical illness or disease that would stop you from having the treatment, or to make sure that your other illnesses are well controlled.

- You will also meet with your psychiatrist to talk about the medication(s) you take. They will tell you which medications you **should** and **should not** take before your ECT treatment.
- You will meet the nurses who will care for you during your first ECT session. If you have any questions, you can ask any of the nurses or doctors.
- You or the person who can legally make treatment decisions for you (often a relative), must give written consent for treatment.
- On the day of your treatment, an anesthetist (doctor who specializes in putting you to sleep before surgery) will recheck your health record to make sure there are no reasons why you cannot have ECT.
- In the treatment room, the nurses will put 3 small sticky pads on your chest. This lets the doctors monitor your heart during the ECT.
- You will have an intravenous (IV) catheter inserted (put in) into a vein in your arm. The anesthetist will put you to sleep by injecting medication into the IV.
- Another set of sticky pads will be put on your forehead. These pads let staff watch the effect of the electrical current on your brain. This gives them information about how well your treatment is working.

- Two small metal discs coated with a special gel are used to give the treatment. When the anesthetist says you are ready, the psychiatrist will pass a small, measured electrical current through the discs.
- **You will not feel anything during your ECT treatment.**

What will happen during the treatment?

- The electrical current will cause you to have a very mild seizure. **You will not be able to feel this.**
- The equipment will tell us about every reaction you have during your treatment. The seizure usually lasts from 20 to 120 seconds.
- After the seizure, the anesthetist will keep giving you oxygen until you start to breathe on your own and wake up.
- A team of nurses will watch you closely in the recovery room until you are ready to go home.

What are the possible side effects?

- Most people have a bit of confusion when waking up after treatment. This usually gets better in 30 to 90 minutes.

- You may feel sleepy or confused for a few hours after each treatment.
- **You must arrange for someone to drive you home.**
- You may have muscle aches and a headache. These should get better within a day. Taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®) can help. Make sure to follow the instructions on the label.
- During treatment, you may notice that you have some trouble forming new memories or retrieving (bringing back) memories, usually from the time right before your treatment. When the treatments end or are spaced out over time, these problems get better. If you continue to have problems, they will usually happen around the time of your ECT treatment.
- Very rarely, some people have gaps in their memory of events long in the past. While these memories are important, most people still believe the treatment is worthwhile to treat their depression. These memory gaps usually go away once the ECT treatment ends.
- ECT is a safe and effective treatment. If you have any questions, please ask your health care team.

How many treatments will I need?

- Each person's ECT needs are different. Your psychiatrist will talk with you about why you need ECT and how many treatments you will need.
- You may not need the number of treatments they advise. This will depend on how well the treatments are working.
- **Your treatment may be cancelled if you have:**
 - › Within the last 4 weeks (1 month) had a heart attack, stroke, or transient ischemic attack (TIA)
 - › Recent breathing problems, like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
 - › Heart failure
 - › An irregular heartbeat
 - › Chest pain that does not go away easily
 - › Fever (temperature above 38° C/100.4° F)
 - › Flu symptoms, like a fever, new cough, sore throat, or muscle or joint pain

Where can I get more information?

Ask your psychiatrist or a nurse for more information about ECT.

Getting ready for ECT

We know that you may be nervous about having your first ECT treatment. We try to give you all of the information you need to understand the treatment and what to expect.

On the day before ECT

- **Do not eat or drink after midnight.**
- Talk to your doctor about what medication you should and should not take before your treatment.
- **Take your morning medication with only a sip of water.**

On the day of ECT

- Come to the Colchester East Hants Health Centre. You can park in the public parking lot in front of the building.
- Enter through the front doors. You may be greeted by site screeners if we are still following Covid-19 rules.
- Go to Day Procedures on the second floor. You can use the elevator or the stairs.
- In Day Procedures, you will register and wait to be called into Day Surgery.
- The treatment will take place in the recovery room.

- If you bring a support person(s) to your appointment, they must wait outside the Clinic during your treatment.
- **Please leave your driver's phone number with the nurse or unit clerk.** We will call them 30 minutes before you will be able to leave the Clinic.
- In Day Surgery, a nurse will check your temperature, blood pressure, and pulse. They will give you a hospital identification (ID) bracelet.
- Please leave any valuables (money, credit cards, jewelry) at home. **Please note:** The hospital is not responsible for the loss or damage of any item.
- Remove any dentures, eyeglasses, hearing aids, and/or jewelry. We will put them in a secure place and give them back after your treatment.
- A nurse in Day Surgery will ask you questions about your health in order to complete a safety checklist. Once the checklist is completed, you will see your doctors to have your treatment.

- After your treatment, you will spend 30 to 60 minutes (half an hour to an hour) in the recovery room. Then we will bring you back to the Day Procedures reception area by wheelchair. We will call your driver to tell them your treatment is finished, and you are ready to be picked up.
- While you are in the outpatient reception area, we will check your blood pressure again. You will rest until you are discharged (about 30 to 60 minutes).
- We will give you juice and crackers. You may also bring your own snack.
- You may be confused after your treatment, but this will get better as the day goes on. Have someone stay with you when you get home until you feel fully recovered.

Remember:

- **You cannot drive yourself home after your treatment.** You must arrange for someone to drive you home. The hospital is not responsible for arranging transportation after treatment. **When you arrive, be sure to give Clinic staff (nurse or unit clerk) your driver's phone number.** We will call them 30 minutes before you will be able to leave.
- Anyone who comes with you to your appointment must wait outside the Clinic during your treatment.

Other instructions:

Questions for my health care provider:

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

Nova Scotia Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.