

Patient information

Awake Fibreoptic Intubation

Surgery Aintree

What is Awake Fibreoptic Intubation?

General anaesthesia (sleep-like state) requires positioning a breathing tube into your windpipe (intubation) to support and protect your breathing, while maintaining oxygenation to your body.

For some operations, it is safer for the breathing tube to be placed while you are awake. For your surgery, the breathing tube will be placed using a slim, flexible tube with a camera on the end (fibreoptic intubation).

Why will I need a Fibreoptic Intubation?

Your safety is paramount. Breathing involves air travelling from your mouth and nose down the airway into your lungs. Some people face risks during anaesthesia as their airway may be challenging, making it difficult to insert a breathing tube, which can be very serious, even life-threatening. Positioning the tube in your windpipe while awake may be an unpleasant experience, but it ensures it works properly before full anaesthesia commences.

What to expect during an Awake Fibreoptic Intubation?

The procedure takes place in the operating theatre. Routine devices to monitor your vital signs (e.g., heart rate) will be attached, and a small cannula (drip) inserted into a vein. You will receive extra oxygen via the nose. The anaesthetist will numb your nose and throat with a local anaesthetic spray. A sedative medication will run through the drip to make you feel calm and relaxed.

A fibreoptic scope is passed through your nose or mouth into your windpipe; you may feel like coughing. The breathing tube is then guided into the windpipe over the fibreoptic scope; you may feel some pressure sensations. The fibreoptic scope is removed and final safety checks are done to confirm position of the breathing tube. Once the tube is in place, a full anaesthetic will be given so that you fall asleep quickly.

What will I feel?

We aim to keep you comfortable. However, there will be unpleasant moments that the local anaesthetic spray (numbing the airway) and the sedative medication should help you manage. Once the fibreoptic scope is in place, you may find it difficult to talk or breathe normally – but you will be fully asleep within moments.

What to expect after having had an Awake Fibreoptic Intubation?

The anaesthetist will make sure that you are able to breathe for yourself before the breathing tube is removed, so you may be aware of this. Your nose and throat may still feel numb, and you may have a mild sore throat and hoarse voice. All of these symptoms will disappear naturally and will not need any further treatment. Wait until the numbness has worn off before having anything to eat or drink.

What are the risks of an Awake Fibreoptic Intubation?

The procedure is generally very safe; but alongside the usual risks of general anaesthesia there are specific risks which the anaesthetist will explain to you. Some of these include:

- Minor damage to the nose or throat
- Nosebleeds
- More than one attempt may be needed
- Injury to the voicebox

At all stages of the procedure you will be carefully monitored by the anaesthetist and the medical team.

What will happen if I decide not to have an Awake Fibreoptic Intubation?

If you decide against this procedure, your anaesthetist or surgeon will discuss any possible alternatives with you. In some cases, however, the surgery may not be possible without this technique.

If you have any additional questions please ask your anaesthetist on the day of the procedure.

What can you do to prepare?

Follow the preoperative advice given to you by the healthcare team caring for you.

We appreciate this is a stressful time for you. The following links are to resources with useful tips on how to empower yourself during this procedure:

NHS relaxation video: <https://tinyurl.run/0PKYrz>
<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress/>

Further information

Dental abscesses are twice as likely in patients who smoke.
Call the free Smokefree National Helpline on 0300 123 1044.

Use this website to locate your closest Stop Smoking Service:
<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/find-your-local-stop-smoking-service/>

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Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

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Review date: July 2027

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