



Northpark  
PRIVATE HOSPITAL

# Electroconvulsive Treatment (ECT)

Patient Information



Northpark Private Hospital provides a safe, effective and state-of-the-art ECT service. ECT is a well established, safe and effective treatment in some psychiatric conditions and provision of this service requires the organization to have prescribed equipment, safe and appropriate venue, good governance and other adequate facilities. Northpark Private Hospital ECT has a well established ECT team and there are a number of senior psychiatrists, anaesthetists and nursing staff who support this service.

## What is ECT?

ECT is a medical procedure performed under controlled anaesthesia and muscle relaxation in which modified seizures, induced by the selective passage of an electrical current through the brain, are used for therapeutic purposes. (Please ask your ECT nurse for more information or to watch a short film on ECT.)

ECT is most commonly prescribed for treating severe depression but may also be used for other types of serious mental illnesses such as mania, schizophrenia, catatonia and other neuropsychiatric conditions.

Representations of ECT in popular culture have tended to be alarmist and have had a negative public impact. However, research studies support its use as a safe and effective psychiatric treatment.

ECT is an important treatment in modern psychiatric practice. Continuing advances in treatment technology have enabled more selective treatment according to individual need to minimize side effects and improve outcomes. The advances have also led to ECT being seen as a treatment of choice, where clinically indicated, rather than a treatment of last resort when all other options have failed.

**There are various types of ECT, please discuss these options with your Psychiatrist before giving consent.**

ECT is administered by a Psychiatrist who is trained and experienced in ECT alongside trained professionals ie. Anaesthetist and nurses to whom other psychiatrists refer patients for treatment.

## What happens when I have ECT?

- ECT is prescribed by your doctor where appropriate and in accordance with widely accepted clinical guidelines. It is good practice to seek a second independent opinion regarding ECT from an ECT psychiatrist prior to commencement of an ECT course.
- The ECT team delivers the prescribed treatment on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings within the operating theatre complex of the hospital.
- Your doctor considers ECT where appropriate and discusses this with you and your nominated carers/family member.
- Your doctor may request a second opinion from an ECT psychiatrist or a colleague, this is recommended for patients who haven't had ECT before.
- Informed consent is obtained from you by your doctor in the presence of an independent witness.
- You are then booked for ECT, the ECT coordinator discusses the preparation required and the process of ECT.
- You may require an anaesthetic review and this will be organized by your doctor. In all other cases, the anaesthetist will review you on the morning of ECT.
- On the day of ECT, you have to have an empty stomach for anaesthesia. You will be taken to Theatre, prepared and given treatment under anaesthesia. You will then be observed in the operation theatre complex until you recover and are transferred back to the ward or discharged home.
- Throughout the course of ECT the ECT Nurse Coordinator and nursing staff will be there to care for and support all individuals undergoing ECT in a calming environment.

## Consenting to ECT

You will be asked by your doctor to sign a consent form for ECT. This consent form acknowledges consent for a course of ECT. Before you sign the form, your doctor will explain what the treatment involves and answer any questions you may have.

**You can refuse to have ECT and withdraw your consent at any time before or during a course of treatment.** Withdrawal of your consent for ECT will not alter your right to continued treatment with alternative methods.



## What are the side effects of ECT?

Most people experience temporary short-term memory loss. This memory loss is of “anterograde” nature- that is you will have difficulty in laying down new memories during the course of ECT. This is mainly related to the induction of seizure. Fewer patients have “retrograde” memory loss which tends to be patchy and may include less commonly used memories e.g. pin numbers, phone numbers, etc.

Usually your memory returns to normal within a few days or a week following treatment. In a small number of patients, some memory loss for things that happened to you before you had the treatment continue for a few months after the treatment has stopped.

There is no evidence to show that there is any permanent damage to memory, and ECT does not cause brain damage.

Some people wake up with no side effects at all. Others may feel vague, somewhat confused and/or have a headache. Medications can be given for this headache. Some people experience some muscle aches; these are more evident after the first treatment (due to the muscle relaxant drug), resting in bed will help with this and again, the use of pain medication may be required.

Occasionally there have been instances when a patient has bitten their tongue or lip during treatment. There is also the risk of damage to teeth. If you have any questions please feel free to ask your nurse, psychiatrist, or a member of the ECT team.

## Outpatient/Maintenance ECT

Your Psychiatrist has prescribed you ECT to treat your condition and may recommend that you receive this treatment on an outpatient basis.

Sometimes it may be better to decrease the frequency of ECT and stop it over a period of few weeks to months, or some patients may benefit from ongoing less frequent treatment to stop their symptoms from recurring. ECT provided in these situations may be termed as continuation or maintenance treatment. These treatments can be provided on a “day” basis without needing to stay for longer than 3-4 hours in hospital.

Outpatient ECT is usually delivered on Tuesday mornings unless other arrangements have been made with your Psychiatrist or a member of the ECT team.

You must not have anything to eat or drink from midnight on the day before each treatment. If you are taking medications in the morning don't take them on the morning of your treatment; bring them with you along with a list of the medications you are on and give them to the nurse. The nurse will give them to you with a drink after your treatment.

There may be some medications you need to take prior to ECT. Please discuss this with your doctor e.g. Anti-hypertensive medication may need to be given orally one hour prior to the treatment with a sip of water.

On the day of the ECT you will need to:

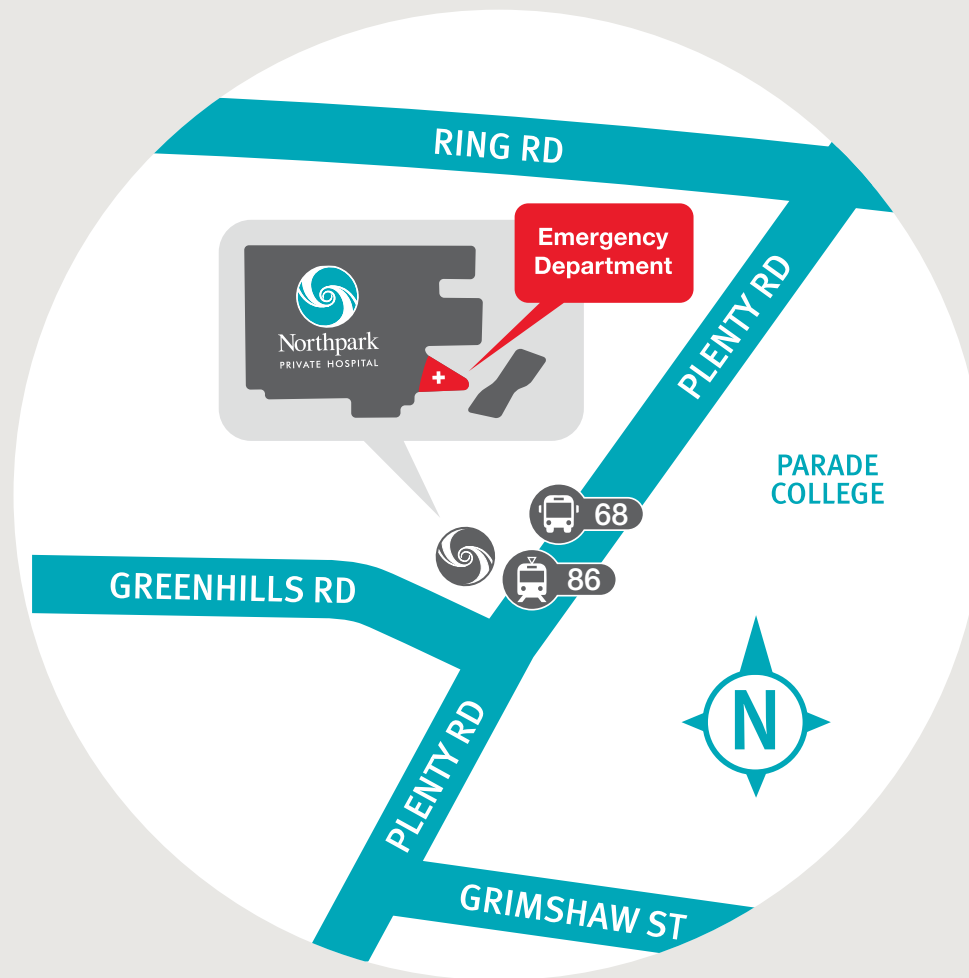
- Dress in loose, comfortable clothing
- Ensure that your hair is clean, dry and free from hair pins, clips or ties
- Remove any excess jewellery, oral jewellery and nose rings, any jewellery unable to be removed can be taped (so you are not scratched during anaesthesia)
- Remove nail polish and makeup (so the clinical staff can check your skin colour).

If you develop any infection such as severe cold during the time that you are having ECT this may mean that you are not able to have an anaesthetic. If this happens, you should contact your doctor who will advise you what to do.

You must not drive a car on the day on which you have treatment or travel unaccompanied. A family member or responsible adult should bring you in for treatment and must take you home.

You should not be alone when you return home for 24 hours or until you have fully recovered from the anaesthetic; and you should have a phone available in case you have any problems and need to contact the hospital.





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