



LIFE MENTAL HEALTH

ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY

What is electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)?

ECT has been used for many years as part of the effective treatment of patients suffering from severe mental illnesses. The value of this treatment is known worldwide. The method has been improved in recent years yielding better results and less side effects. Modern ECT is safe and comfortable for most people. For some conditions, it is the best and safest treatment option.

Why do I need ECT?

ECT is used to treat:

- Patients with major depression (especially those who are suicidal), mania and some forms of schizophrenia.
- Depressed patients when antidepressants –
 - have not worked;
 - have caused very bad side effects; or
 - could not be taken safely due to the patient's medical condition.

ECT, by treating your mental illness, may stabilise your emotions and improve your ability to think. There is no evidence that ECT causes brain damage or any harmful changes in personality. Your doctor will discuss with you why ECT is the best treatment and what other treatment options are available.

What do I need to do before ECT?

- You must fast and should not eat any food or drink any liquid for several hours before the ECT treatment.
- You **MUST** tell the doctor if there is any chance you may be pregnant.
- Before treatment you will be examined mentally and physically to make sure you are as fit as possible to have a short general anaesthetic (as with any other procedure).

Can I carry on taking my medication?

Your doctor may have to change your medications before ECT. Some medications can affect how well ECT works.

ECT: Comfortable and clinically safe

- ECT therapy is often associated with the barbaric representation in films.
- Life Mental Health is wholly against patient abuse and the violation of patient rights and we support clinically appropriate interventions as prescribed internationally and/or by specialists.
- You will be brought into the special ECT treatment area. Staff will monitor you before, during and after treatment and will attach:
 - a blood pressure cuff on your arm.
 - a small device on your finger which will monitor your pulse and blood oxygen levels.
 - small stick-on electrodes on your forehead to record your brain's electrical activity during the treatment.
 - an oxygen mask over your nose and mouth for oxygen to prepare your body and brain for the treatment.
- Extra equipment may be used if there are additional risk factors that are known from your medical history, examinations or tests.
- You will have a short general anaesthetic so that you will be asleep and not feel or remember the treatment. This is to ensure your comfort during the procedure.
- An anaesthetist will inject an anaesthetic into your vein, allowing it to work quickly and effectively. You will also be given a muscle relaxant to keep you relaxed during treatment. During the treatment, the anaesthetist will continue to give you oxygen and monitor your heart rate and oxygen level.
- A doctor who has specialised training in electroconvulsive therapy will perform the treatment. He/she will put additional electrodes on your head and a measured amount of electricity will be



passed to a part of the brain which will cause a seizure or fit – lasting about one minute. You will be kept comfortable throughout.

- Within a few minutes, the anaesthetic drugs will have worn off and you will wake up. During this time, you will be moved to the recovery room where you will be carefully monitored until you are awake enough to return to your ward or be taken home (if done on an outpatient basis). The anaesthetic drugs and the seizure could make you feel groggy. You may only eat 15-20 minutes after the treatment.

What are the side effects and risks of ECT?

- In the unlikely event of experiencing side effects such as headache, nausea or vomiting, please let staff know so that they can give you some medication to alleviate these symptoms.
- You may experience muscle soreness due to either the muscle relaxants or the muscle activity caused by the seizure.
- Immediately after ECT most people have a short period of confusion and do not remember the actual treatment. The anaesthetic will affect your judgment for the first 24 hours. During this time YOU MUST NOT:
 - Drive any type of vehicle.
 - Operate machinery including cooking implements.
 - Make important decisions or sign a legal document.
 - Drink alcohol, take other mind altering substances, or smoke as it may react with the anaesthetic drugs.
- ECT may affect short-term memory. Existing memory problems caused by your illness may also get worse. Memories of events from your past are less likely to be affected by ECT. Although specific memories may not return, your overall memory will work better in the weeks to months after treatment. Your doctor/s are aware of possible memory problems and will prescribe treatment methods to avoid affecting your memory as much as possible.
- As with any general anaesthetic, small risks exist, but are very unlikely. With modern ECT and a short anaesthetic, risks are now extremely rare. Medical care and treatment will be given throughout. There may be a temporary rise in blood pressure and heart rate followed by a slowing of the heart rate. You will be monitored throughout.
- Modern anaesthetic methods have improved patient outcomes and decreased risks previously associated with anaesthetics.

Where to from now?

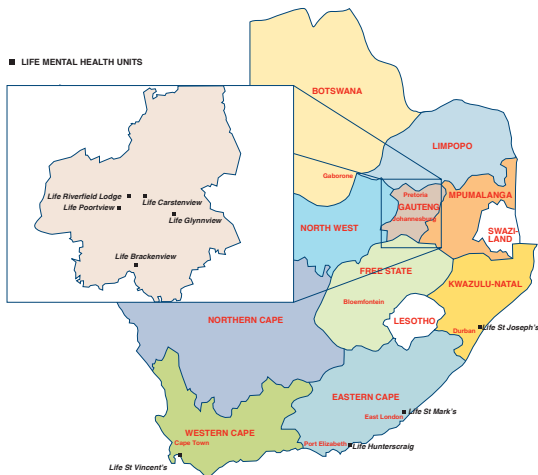
Whilst your illness may be treated with a course of ECT, the illness may return once the course has been completed. To help prevent this, your doctor will discuss any further treatment you may need after your ECT course with you. This could include: medication, maintenance ECT and/or psychotherapy.

Where else can I get more information?

Ask your doctor and/or nurse to explain the information you do not understand or if you have any concerns. You are also entitled to a second opinion from another doctor.

Further information about ECT is also available – please ask staff for this or contact your closest Life Mental Health facility.

Mental health units across South Africa



EASTERN CAPE

LIFE HUNTERS CRAIG PRIVATE HOSPITAL

22 Park Drive, Central
Port Elizabeth 6001
Tel: 041 586 2664

LIFE ST MARK'S CLINIC

16 St Andrews Road, Southernwood,
East London 5201
Tel: 043 707 4400

KWAZULU-NATAL

LIFE ST JOSEPH'S

82 Mazisi Kunene (South Ridge) Road,
Berea, Durban 4001
Tel: 031 204 1300

WESTERN CAPE

LIFE ST VINCENT'S

Alexandra Road, Pinelands, Cape Town, 7405
Po Box 103, Howard Place, 7450
Tel: 021 506 5360

GAUTENG

LIFE BRACKENVIEW

22 De Waal Street, Brackendowns, 1448
Tel: 010 009 6200

LIFE CARSTENVIEW

21 Dane Road, Glen Austin, Midrand, 1685
Private Bag x 54, Halfway House, 1685
Tel: 011 655 5791

LIFE GLYNNVIEW

129 - 130 Howard Avenue
Benoni 1501
Tel: 011 741 5462

LIFE POORTVIEW

18 Malcolm Road, Poortview
Roodepoort 1724
Tel: 011 952 3000

LIFE RIVERFIELD LODGE

34 Southernwoods Road, Nietgedacht,
Randburg 2194
Tel: 086 074 8373

www.lifehealthcare.co.za