

# Electroconvulsive Therapy

## A Guide For Patients/Families



**This brochure provides information about Electroconvulsive therapy. It is designed to respond to the questions most frequently asked by patients and their families.**



آغا خان یونیورسٹی ہسپتال، کراچی

The Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi.

P.O. Box 3500, Stadium Road, Karachi-74800, Pakistan,

Website: [www.aku.edu](http://www.aku.edu)



## **What Is ECT ? (Electroconvulsive Therapy)**

Electroconvulsive therapy is one of the safest and most effective treatments for symptoms of major depression and certain psychotic conditions, especially when those symptoms have not responded to medication and psychotherapy. ECT is carried out under general anaesthesia.

An electrical current is passed through the brain to induce generalised seizures. These seizures, usually lasting 25 – 30 seconds, seem to restore chemical make up within the brain, and decrease symptoms of serious mental illness.

### **When Is ECT Carried Out?**

- A course of ECT usually consists of three treatments a week on alternate days up to 12 treatments.
- It will only be given with your informed, written consent or the consent of your next of kin. You/they must understand your illness, the nature and procedure of the treatment, the reasons for recommending ECT, alternative treatments and what will happen if you/they choose to refuse the ECT.
- ECT may be given during the hospital stay or as an out-patient. It is always carried out in the Psychiatry Unit.

### **What Tests Are Needed Before ECT?**

- A complete psychiatric, medical and neurological assessment.
- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Blood tests
- X-ray - spine
- Weight and vital signs
- Other tests for general anaesthesia fitness





## **What Other Preparation Is Needed?**

- No eating or drinking after midnight before the ECT.
- Medicines, if needed after midnight, may be taken with small sips of water.

## **How Is ECT Given?**

- Hospital clothes are worn for the treatment.
- Dentures, metal hairpins, jewellery, undergarments, shoes and slippers are removed.
- Bladder must be empty.
- An intravenous (IV) line will be started so that medicine can be given directly into your blood.
- You will be given an anaesthetic medicine to relax your muscles.
- The psychiatrist, a medical officer, a nurse and nursing assistant will be with you during the treatment.
- Your heart rate, blood pressure and breathing will be watched closely.
- After you are asleep, a mild electrical current will be applied to your head for about four seconds to produce a controlled seizure while preventing any injury.
- You will wake up within five minutes and be watched closely until you are fully recovered.
- After approximately two hours you can eat and have soft drinks, return to your hospital room or go home.



## **What Are The Possible Side Effects Of Ect?**

- Reversible, short term memory loss may occur.
- Nausea, muscle aches and headache for a brief period of time.

## **What Happens When Ect Course Is Finished?**

You will probably be on medication. It is important to keep taking the medicine prescribed so that you don't become depressed again. Your doctor will ask you to attend the clinic to assess your progress.

## **For Further Information, Please Call:**

Psychiatry Clinic  
Aga Khan University Hospital  
Karachi.  
Phone : 4930051, Ext : 1016

Psychiatry Ward  
Aga Khan University Hospital  
Karachi.  
Phone : 4930051, Ext : 3090-91