Electroconvulsive Therapy

ECT Clinic

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Electroconvulsive Therapy, or ECT, is a long-established, safe, and effective treatment. This brochure will give you some information about ECT, and hopefully answer your questions. If you still have questions after reading this, please ask your psychiatrist or nursing staff.

When Is ECT Indicated?
ECT is used as a treatment for depression, mania, schizoaffective disorder, and dementia complicated by an underlying mood disorder. ECT involves the use of a brief seizure within the brain. This seizure activity causes biochemical changes that may help to decrease your symptoms or even cause them to stop. The results of ECT can be seen more quickly than the results of medications.

How Does ECT Work?
ECT works to improve the patient’s mood. It stabilizes one’s sleep pattern, appetite, and increases energy. It usually takes about 4–6 treatments to begin to experience benefits. A full course of ECT is usually 10–12 treatments. Frequently, others will notice an improvement before you do. Even though ECT may decrease or end a depression, it will not prevent another episode from occurring weeks, months, or years later. Because of this, you and your doctor will need to discuss what you will do after treatments are completed. Many people use medications to prevent this relapse, some people use maintenance ECT.

What Needs To Be Completed Before I Start ECT?
To begin ECT, your psychiatrist will determine if ECT will be of benefit for you. You will need to be seen by a physician. He/she will review your medical history, EKG, and blood work results. You will sign a consent form.

Do I Need To Be Hospitalized To Have ECT?
Treatments are given to both inpatients and outpatients. If you commute, you must have someone drive you home. Because of anesthesia, you may not drive after an ECT treatment or the rest of that day. After an ECT treatment, you must have someone stay with you the rest of the day.
When Is ECT Given?
An acute series of ECT is given three times a week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. They are administered by a team of physicians and nurses who have had specialized training and experience in this type of treatment.

Can I Take My Medications Before An ECT Treatment?
You must not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before your treatment. If you take medications such as Ativan, Xanax, or Klonopin, do not take any after 5 p.m. the night before your treatment. These medications will interfere with your treatment. On the morning of your treatment you may brush your teeth, but do not swallow the water. Do not chew gum or suck on hard candies or cough drops.

If you are taking heart or blood pressure medications, you should take those medications the morning of your treatments with sips of water—only enough water to swallow them. Talk with your psychiatrist and/or nursing staff about the medications you are taking.

What Happens When I Get To The ECT Clinic?
When you arrive in the ECT Clinic, the staff will greet you. They will take your blood pressure. They will direct you to the restroom and may give you a hospital gown. The staff will direct you to the Prep Room where they will help you onto a stretcher. They will raise the head of the stretcher to make you feel more comfortable. An intravenous (IV) line will be started. The medications will be given through this line. It will be removed in the Recovery Room.

In the treatment room, there will be a psychiatrist, anesthesiologist, and a registered nurse to care for you.

The psychiatrist may place a band around your forehead. You will always be asleep when you receive your treatment.

The registered nurse will take your blood pressure and place a clip on your finger to monitor your oxygen saturation. The anesthesiologist will give you a medication that will make you sleep and a muscle relaxant through your IV. You will be asleep about 10 minutes.

While you are asleep, a brief electrical stimulus is given to induce a seizure. Because you are asleep, you will not feel any pain. The seizure is what causes the chemical changes in your brain, not the electricity. Typically, the length of the seizure is only about 30-60 seconds. There will be very little body movement due to the muscle relaxant used. When you wake up, you will be transferred to the Recovery Room.

In the Recovery Room, your blood pressure and oxygen saturation will be monitored. Usually your stay will last 20-30 minutes.

What Are The Risks Of ECT?
With any medical treatment there are risks involved. The risks of ECT are related to the use of the general anesthesia and to the treatment. The most common side effects are nausea, headaches, muscle aches, potential short-term/long-term memory loss (usually memories right around the time of the ECT treatments), and possibly a serious complication of anesthesia. Severe complications from anesthesia are extremely rare.

What Are The Side Effects Of ECT?
Many people do not experience any side effects from ECT. If you do experience headaches, muscle aches, or nausea, please let the
You may take some medications to help decrease these side effects. Other potential side effects consist of confusion and memory loss. Usually, as people awaken and become more alert, they become less confused. Psychological tests show that memory loss can occur for events that happen a few weeks surrounding the treatments. While psychological tests do not confirm permanent memory loss, some patients report lasting trouble remembering some things occurring a few months prior to and/or after their treatments.

**Summary**

There have been many advances in the treatment of mental illness in the past few years. ECT remains the most effective and safe treatment for some patients, particularly when alternative treatments like medications, are either unsafe or ineffective.

**ECT Purpose Statement**

The ECT Clinic provides excellence in care with Christian compassion. We treat patients and their families as partners in the healing process.

For more information about Electroconvulsive Therapy, please call us at (616) 281-6341.