

While we are prepared for this happening, studies have shown that serious cases of toxicity are extremely rare with techniques like RSCs.

For more information, please contact the Acute Pain Team on 01270 612747.

Symptoms of local anaesthetic toxicity can include:

- Feeling dizzy or light-headed
- Tingling of the lips and/or tongue
- Ringing in the ears
- Blurred vision
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Feeling unwell or drowsy

If you experience any of these symptoms, inform the nursing staff without delay. These symptoms do not definitely mean you have local anaesthetic toxicity but you will be assessed for this.

Rectus Sheath Catheters for pain relief after surgery

Information for patients and relatives



This leaflet is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask a member of staff.



What are rectus sheath catheters?

Rectus sheath catheters (RSCs) are small plastic tubes that can be inserted into the wall of your abdomen (tummy) after some types of surgery. You would be given continuous local anaesthetic through them to help with pain relief after surgery.

How do RSCs work?

RSCs can be placed at the end of surgery, either by the surgeon directly (most commonly), or the anaesthetist using ultrasound. The ends of the RSCs sit under the rectus muscle (the 'six-pack'), and are connected to a small disposable pump; through this, local anaesthetic medication is given continuously.

One RSC is placed on each side of the surgical incision (cut). The local anaesthetic surrounds some of the nerves in the abdomen, and provides pain relief. The RSCs usually stay in for two days, but this can be up to five days for some people.

The types of surgery where this can be done are operations involving a midline incision (cut down the middle of the abdomen).

What are the benefits of RSCs?

There is robust evidence that RSCs provide excellent pain relief after this type of surgery. You may still need some strong painkillers, although you may not need so much. This means you may experience fewer side effects from these painkillers, which can help you recover sooner. Also, RSCs may help you move around more after surgery and possibly spend less time in hospital.

What are the risks of RSCs?

Failure of technique

The RSCs may not work as well as hoped, or may work better on one side than the other. In this case, you will still have access to other forms of pain relief.

Disconnection

Occasionally the RSCs may become accidentally disconnected from the pump. If this happens, we will remove the RSCs to prevent infection, and you will be able to have other forms of pain relief.

Infection

The RSCs are made of a type of material designed to reduce the risk of infection, and they are inserted in a sterile way. However, infection is possible and we monitor you for signs of this. If there are signs of infection, we will remove the RSCs and treat your infection.

Bleeding

There is a small chance that the RSCs could cause bleeding under the skin. We will monitor the RSC sites for signs of this. Then your surgeon will advise on how best to treat this in your case.

Local anaesthetic toxicity

A rare side effect of local anaesthetic medicines is the risk of toxicity, i.e. problems caused by too much local anaesthetic being absorbed into the body. This can be mild or serious; in very serious (and rare) cases, it can cause heart problems, unconsciousness or death.

The amount of local anaesthetic you will be given will be below the maximum dose considered safe. We will also monitor you for any signs of local anaesthetic toxicity. If there is any suspicion of this occurring, we will stop the local anaesthetic and treat you appropriately (the details of this will vary depending on the seriousness).