

13 Anaesthesia

1 Choose the best headings (1–6) to match the sections of the text (A–D). There are two more headings than you need.

- 1 Some types of anaesthesia _____
- 2 Death on the operating table _____
- 3 A short history of anaesthesia _____
- 4 Anaesthetic nurses _____
- 5 What is 'anaesthesia'? _____
- 6 Anaesthesia today _____

2 Answer these questions about the text.

- 1 How do anaesthetic drugs work?
- 2 Why do you think patients were held or strapped down before anaesthetic drugs were available?
- 3 What difference did anaesthetic drugs make to the work of surgeons?
- 4 Which was safer to use – ether or chloroform?
- 5 Which was easier to use – ether or chloroform?
- 6 Do patients lose consciousness during regional anaesthesia?
- 7 Is death resulting from anaesthesia common?

3 Find words or phrases in the text with these meanings.

- a having a strong effect _____
- b loses the power to feel _____
- c disappear gradually _____

FACTFILE

ANAESTHESIA

- A** 'Anaesthesia' means 'loss of sensation'. Drugs that cause anaesthesia work by blocking the signals that pass along your nerves to your brain. This stops you feeling pain. When the drugs wear off, you start to feel normal sensations again.
- B** The development of effective anaesthetics in the 19th century was an important factor in successful surgery. Before this time, few operations were possible, and surgeons were judged by their speed. Some doctors used alcohol or morphine to reduce the pain, but patients were usually held or strapped down. Many died on the operating table. Anaesthesia meant that surgeons could take more time and perform more complex procedures.
- Ether was one of earliest anaesthetics, but it had some drawbacks – for example, it could cause vomiting. It was quickly replaced by chloroform, which was more potent and easier to use than ether. However, it was not as safe to use as ether, and could cause sudden death. By the 1920s, intravenous induction agents were introduced. They enabled patients to fall asleep quickly and pleasantly. In the 1940s muscle relaxants became available.
- C** Anaesthesia can be given in different ways, and not all anaesthesia makes you unconscious.
- Local anaesthesia numbs a small part of your body. You stay conscious but free from pain.
 - Regional anaesthesia can be used for operations on larger or deeper parts of the body. The most common regional anaesthetics (also known as regional 'blocks') are spinal and epidural anaesthetics. These can be used for operations on the lower body, such as Caesarean sections, bladder operations, or hip replacements. You stay conscious but free from pain.
 - General anaesthesia is a state of controlled unconsciousness, and you feel nothing. It is essential for some operations such as abdominal surgery. As the anaesthetic drugs wear off, your consciousness starts to return.
- D** Modern monitoring systems and a greater understanding of the functions of the body mean that anaesthesia is now very safe. Fewer than 1 in 250,000 deaths during operations are directly related to anaesthesia.

