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Eating and drinking before your anaesthetic

> **The short version.** A light meal up to **6 hours** before your anaesthetic. Clear fluids up to **2 hours** before (1 hour if your hospital uses a "sip til send" policy). Take your usual tablets with a small sip of water. Fasting longer than this does not make you safer — it makes you thirsty, headachy and more likely to feel sick afterwards.

Having an empty stomach lowers the risk of stomach contents coming back up and getting into your lungs while you are asleep. That is the only reason we ask you to fast, and it is why the times below are minimums, not targets to beat.

Adults and children over 16

WHAT	STOP THIS LONG BEFORE ANAESTHESIA
Solid food — a light, low-fat meal (toast, cereal, fruit, sandwich)	**6 hours**
Clear fluids — water, pulp-free juice, clear cordial, black tea or coffee, carbohydrate drinks	**2 hours**
Clear fluids under a "sip til send" policy — small sips of water allowed until you are wheeled to theatre (about 200 mL an hour), if your hospital runs this	**1 hour**
Your regular tablets with a sip of water (about 30 mL)	**allowed**

> **Clear does not mean "see-through".** Milky or smooth drinks, soup, jelly, yoghurt and smoothies are **food**, not clear fluid — they count as a meal. Chewing gum and boiled lollies should be out of your mouth before you go to sleep, though they don't delay the operation unless you have swallowed them.

> **If you take a GLP-1 medicine** — semaglutide (Ozempic, Wegovy, Rybelsus), dulaglutide (Trulicity), liraglutide (Saxenda, Victoza), tirzepatide (Mounjaro) or exenatide — the preparation is different and longer, because these medicines slow the stomach emptying. You keep taking the medicine, but you drink **clear fluids only for the whole day before** your procedure, with no solid food, then small amounts of water (about 125 mL an hour) on the day until a set time: 6 am for a morning procedure, 11 am for an afternoon one. You will be given those times in writing. Do not simply follow the standard times below.

Children 16 and under

WHAT	STOP THIS LONG BEFORE ANAESTHESIA
Clear fluids (encouraged — about 3 mL/kg each hour)	**1 hour**
Breast milk	**3 hours**
Formula or other milk — infant under 12 months (up to 200 mL or 20 mL/kg)	**4 hours**
Formula or other milk — child over 12 months (treated as a meal)	**6 hours**
Solid food — a light meal	**6 hours**

> **Tell me before the day if:** you have reflux or heartburn, a hiatus hernia, previous stomach or oesophagal surgery, gastric bypass or sleeve surgery, a condition that slows the stomach (including diabetes, scleroderma or gastroparesis), you take a GLP-1 medicine for diabetes or weight loss, you are pregnant, or you have had a bowel obstruction. Any of these may mean the plan needs to change — sometimes with an ultrasound of your stomach on the day.

If your operation is delayed

Waiting is common. You may keep sipping clear fluids until 2 hours before the new start time (1 hour where "sip til send" applies) unless you are told otherwise. Do not start eating again without asking.

Medicines on the morning of surgery

Unless you have been told otherwise, take your usual medicines at the usual time with a small sip of water — the sip is counted as part of your fluid allowance. See *Your other regular medicines* and *Diabetes and weight-loss medicines* for the exceptions.

On your phone: anaesthesia.herman.au/p/1
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Fasting times from the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, **PG07 Pre-anaesthesia consultation (2024), Appendix 1 — Fasting guideline**, appendix revised 2026.
This pamphlet is general information and does not replace individual advice. If my rooms, your surgeon or your hospital have given you different instructions, **those instructions take priority** over anything written here.

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