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Shivering and feeling cold afterwards

The short version. Shivering after an anaesthetic is common and usually passes within 20–30 minutes. We warm you actively, and you can ask for another blanket. Tell the nurse if it is severe, or if it comes with a fever.

Why it happens

Anaesthetic drugs interfere with the part of your brain that regulates temperature, and they widen the blood vessels near the skin, so body heat is lost quickly. Operating theatres are also kept cool. Your body responds by shivering to make heat — even when you do not feel especially cold. It is not usually a sign of infection.

What we do

- Warm blankets, forced-air warming (the inflatable blanket that blows warm air), and warmed intravenous fluids.
- Keeping the theatre warm and covering you as much as possible during the operation.
- Medicines for shivering if it is severe, particularly if it is making your wound or chest pain worse.

What helps afterwards

- Ask for another warm blanket — there is no need to be stoic about it.
- Warm drinks once you are allowed them, and dry clothing if you are damp.
- Gentle movement once you are steady on your feet.

Tell the nurse if: the shivering is severe or lasts beyond about half an hour; you feel hot or have a temperature; you have chest pain or breathlessness; or the shivering is accompanied by a severe headache, a rash, or feeling generally unwell. Fever with shivering needs to be looked at rather than assumed to be the anaesthetic.

On your phone: anaesthesia.herman.au/p/9
Prepared by Dr Herman Lim for patients of his anaesthetic practice · version 1.0, 27 November 2026.
Temperature management and shivering are standard anaesthetic practice; ANZCA **PG07 (2024)** covers the pre-anaesthesia assessment that identifies patients at higher risk (older age, low body weight, long surgery).
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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