

Wisconsin Public Psychiatry Network Teleconference (WPPNT)

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# Electroconvulsive Therapy: A Practical Guide

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## Overview

Historical context  
What to expect with ECT  
Common questions

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## History

First application of ECT in 1938  
  
Homeless man with catatonic schizophrenia  
  
Patient started talking, sustained benefit

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## History

Introduced to the United States in 1940  
  
All initial therapies were without anesthesia or paralysis  
  
1952 Succinylcholine introduced as a muscle relaxant with ECT

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## History

Rapid decline in 1950s with the development of psychotropic medications  
  
Negative perception of ECT in popular culture

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### History

Today ECT remains an important somatic treatment for mood and psychotic disorders

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### Indications

Treatment refractory depression and psychosis

Severe or life-threatening psychiatric illness

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### Indications

Depression

- Unipolar or bipolar
- Prior treatment failures
- Acute severity (psychosis, suicidality, inability to care for self)

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### Indications

Catatonia

- Failure of other treatment options
- Court order

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### Indications (less common)

Psychosis

Mania

Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome

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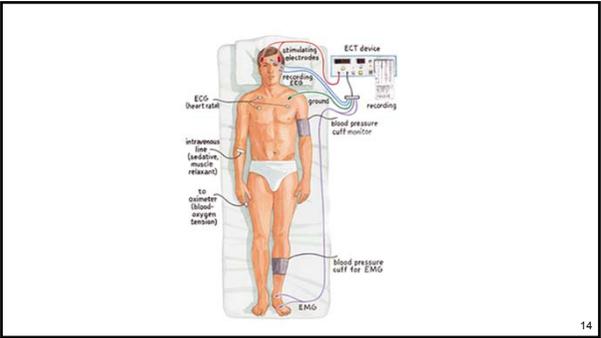
### What to Expect



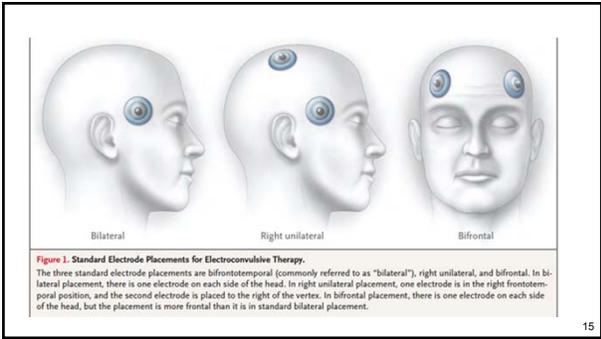
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ECT is typically performed in a hospital, under the supervision of a psychiatrist and an anesthesiologist.

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**Typical ECT Treatment**

Seizure duration between 15 seconds to 1-2 minutes

Monitor motor and EEG duration

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**Typical ECT Course**

6-12 Treatments

2-3 Treatments per week

Treat until improvement plateaus

- No further improvement after two treatments

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**Risks/Side Effects**

- Common: transient confusion, headache, nausea, myalgia, retrograde and anterograde amnesia
- Uncommon: cardiac arrest, unstable arrhythmias, ischemia, severe hypertension or hypotension, stroke, prolonged apnea, aspiration, laryngospasm, prolonged seizures, fractures, malignant hyperthermia

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**Common questions**

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**Does ECT cause brain damage?**

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**Is ECT painful?**

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**Will I be conscious during my treatment?**

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**How will I feel after the treatment?**

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**My tongue is bleeding..what happened?**

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**Why is there “gel” in my hair after the procedure?**

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**My doctor told me I didn't have a seizure, or my seizure was too short. What does this mean?**

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**Can I return home by myself after a treatment?**

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**Why are my treatments every other day (or two times per week) and not daily?**

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**When should I call the doctor?**

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**How long will it take to feel better?**

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