

To give consent, you need to have capacity. This means that you are able to:

- understand the information you are given on ECT,
- remember the information long enough to make a decision on getting ECT,
- make a free choice; and
- tell your doctor what you decide.

## What else do I need to know about ECT?

The Rules and Code also state the following:

- Your doctor should assess you properly before, during and after the programme of ECT.
- Every time you receive ECT, the hospital should keep good records of your treatment.

## Do all hospitals use ECT?

No. You can ask your doctor if ECT is offered as a treatment in your hospital. If you are prescribed ECT, you may have to go to another hospital for your treatment.

## Who we are

The Mental Health Commission was set up under the Mental Health Act 2001. We have two important jobs:

- to make sure that mental health services maintain high standards and good practices, and
- to take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of people detained in approved centres.

## For more information

You can get a full copy of the Rules or the Code of Practice on ECT from the hospital staff or you can contact:

### Mental Health Commission

St. Martin's House  
Waterloo Road  
Dublin 4.  
Telephone: (01) 636 2400  
Email: [info@mhcirl.ie](mailto:info@mhcirl.ie)  
Website: [www.mhcirl.ie](http://www.mhcirl.ie)

**Please note:** This leaflet is only a guide to the Rules and the Code of Practice on ECT. It is not a legal interpretation and it does not give a full description of the Rules or Code of Practice. Please do not rely on it for advice.



## What you need to know about the Rules and Code of Practice on Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT)



When you use mental health services in Ireland, your rights and interests are protected by the Mental Health Act 2001. All staff who give you care and treatment must follow this law. The Act allows approved centres to use a type of treatment called electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). An approved centre is a hospital or in-patient service that is registered by the Mental Health Commission.

In this leaflet, we aim to answer your questions about the Mental Health Commission Rules and Code of Practice on ECT. It does **not** give information about ECT as a treatment. You should talk to your doctor if you would like to know more about ECT.

## What is ECT?

When you are treated with ECT, an electric current is passed briefly through the brain to produce a seizure. It is used to treat some types of major mental illnesses.

## What are the Rules and the Code of Practice on ECT?

The Rules on ECT and the Code of Practice on ECT are very similar. The main difference is that the Rules are law and **must** be followed. The Code of Practice is not law, but it does help to make sure that proper procedures are in place.

The Rules are for staff treating an involuntary patient with ECT. Involuntary means that you did not choose to be admitted to hospital for treatment.

The Code of Practice on ECT is a guide for staff treating a voluntary patient with ECT. A voluntary patient means that you agreed to be admitted to hospital for treatment.

The Inspector of Mental Health Services checks that staff are following the Rules and the Code of Practice.

## Who can give me ECT?

Only your psychiatrist can prescribe ECT and it can only be given to you by a doctor. If you receive ECT, an anaesthetist and nurses will also be involved in your treatment.

## What information will I receive about ECT?

You should get enough information on ECT to help you to decide if you want to consent to it. This information should include:

- what ECT is and why it is used,
- how ECT will benefit you,
- what will happen if you do not have ECT,
- other treatment options, and
- possible side effects of ECT.

## Do I have to consent to ECT?

If you are a **voluntary patient**, it is up to you to choose ECT. Doctors can only give you ECT if they receive your written consent.

If you are an **involuntary patient**, you should also be asked for your written consent. If you do not or cannot consent, your psychiatrist can ask a second psychiatrist to assess you. If they both think that ECT is the best treatment to help you get better, they can give you ECT without your consent.

## What else do I need to know about consent?

According to the Rules and Code, you are free to choose to give your consent. You should be told that you have the right to refuse to give consent for ECT and the right to change your mind at any time.

The difference between the Rules and Code is that if you are an involuntary patient and refuse to give consent, you may still be given ECT, as described in the answer to the previous question.