

UCSF Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) Service

Frequently Asked Questions

Thank you for considering UCSF. We appreciate your inquiry. Below are answers to some questions we frequently receive from patients. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us.

How does my psychiatrist make a referral to the UCSF ECT Service?

The primary (referring) psychiatrist must be board-eligible or board-certified in the state of California. To start a referral, your psychiatrist should email any of the following providers:

- Descartes Li, MD, Director, descartes.li@ucsf.edu, (415) 476-7448
- Ramotse Saunders, MD, ramotse.saunders@ucsf.edu, (415) 476-7506
- Maria Norman, ECT Program Coordinator, maria.norman@ucsf.edu, (415) 476-7848

Once the psychiatrist contacts us, we will reply with an email asking the psychiatrist for the following information:

- A brief description of your condition, diagnosis, reason for referral, and any other special information that might be helpful
- Your medication history – a list of medications tried, with dosages and efficacy/side effects, if available. Also, if TMS or ketamine has been tried or considered. (*This is helpful for insurance authorization purposes.*)
- Results of a Montreal Cognitive Assessment, if done

After the referral has been sent, you can contact the ECT doctor directly by email (preferred), or by phone (also fine)

What are the administrative steps needed to for an evaluation for ECT?

1. **Referral by primary psychiatrist** – Your primary psychiatrist will continue to treat you and help manage your care during the ECT course.
2. **Initial evaluation by ECT psychiatrist** - We strongly encourage family members to attend this. Please be aware that UCSF is a teaching hospital, and you should expect that psychiatric residents and medical students may be involved in your care.
3. **Pre-op evaluation by UCSF Anesthesia (PrePare Clinic)** - This is scheduled by ECT Program Coordinator after the initial evaluation.
4. **Orientation to the ECT procedure area** – This is conducted by ECT program coordinator on the same day as your PrePare Clinic appointment.

Is ECT covered by insurance?

Generally, yes. You should be aware, however, certain insurance companies have preferred contracted ECT centers, so not all insurance providers will cover ECT treatments at UCSF (even if the initial evaluation is covered). We will obtain insurance authorization prior to any services and will help direct you to other covered facilities if we are not contracted by your insurance provider.

How many treatments will I need?

ECT is a series of 6-15 treatments that occur on a Monday/Wednesday/Friday schedule. They occur in the morning and take about three hours from the time patients arrive to the point at which they are discharged to return home. After each ECT treatment, patients **MUST** be picked up by a friend or a family member.

What is the role of my referring psychiatrist once I start ECT?

We are a multi-physician service in an academic setting and acknowledge that your primary referring psychiatrist may know you (the patient) much better than we do. Therefore, we expect and encourage your psychiatrist to continue to be a co-manager of your care.

For example, your psychiatrist should continue to write all the outpatient prescriptions for you (although for prescriptions planned for only the duration of the ECT, we will make exceptions). In addition, your psychiatrist should be the first to respond to acute non-ECT related crises that arise.

We strive to have ongoing communication with your psychiatrist to provide the best care possible for you, and your psychiatrist should not hesitate to email or call us with questions or requests for updates.

Where else can I get information about ECT?

Some resources regarding ECT that we often recommend to patients:

- Mayo Clinic ECT overview: <https://ucsfpsy.ch/ECTmayo>
- Descartes Li video talk about ECT: <https://ucsfpsy.ch/ECTvideo>
- Talks by Descartes Li on other topics: <https://ucsfpsy.ch/ECTmorevideos>
- Wikipedia webpage on ECT: <https://ucsfpsy.ch/ECTwiki>
- Article on treating severe depression with ECT: <https://ucsfpsy.ch/vitalbeat1>
- Article on ECT: <https://ucsfpsy.ch/vitalbeat2>

The Canadian Electroconvulsive Therapy Survey/Standards (CANECTS) has some nice videos showing the procedure and discussion available at <https://ucsfpsy.ch/CANECTS>. (Your browser needs to be Flash enabled.)

Finally, we recommend the book *Shock: The Healing Power of Electroconvulsive Therapy* by Larry Tye and Kitty Dukakis (available from Amazon.com, also in DVD).