Pre-operative Starvation Guidelines (nil-by-mouth)

For patients over 1 year old
All patients admitted for elective surgery should be encouraged to drink clear fluids (water, squash, black tea/coffee) freely up to 2 hours preoperatively.

It is the responsibility of ward staff to ensure that patients remain adequately hydrated before surgery.

All patients admitted for elective surgery should be starved of food (including milky drinks, chewing gum & sweets) for a minimum period of 6 hours preoperatively.

NB patients who are taking clear fluids containing sugar have no need of other nutrition preoperatively and fluid intake should be encouraged (within the above guideline). Feeding must be avoided if there is any uncertainty about the time until surgery – otherwise surgery may be postponed.

All patients admitted for elective surgery should take their regular medication as prescribed unless contraindicated (further guidance is available on ICID) or otherwise instructed.

If for any reason the surgeon or anaesthetist wish to give other instructions regarding fasting or oral medications they must do so by writing clear instructions on the patient’s prescription chart.

- All patients scheduled for surgery on a morning operating list may be offered a clear fluid drink (water, squash, black tea/coffee) before 6.30 am. Children should be encouraged to have a sugar sweetened drink.
- All patients scheduled for surgery on an afternoon list may have tea and toast by 7.30 am and be encouraged to drink clear fluids (water, squash, black tea/coffee) up to 2 hours before theatre. Confirmation of theatre time should be obtained from the theatre staff.

These guidelines do not apply to patients undergoing emergency surgery or who are receiving regular opioid medication – guidance will be given by the anaesthetist.

For patients under 1 year old on regular milk feeds
- No formula milk feeds for 6 hours prior to anaesthesia.
- No breast milk for 4 hours prior to anaesthesia.
- Clear fluids may be given up to 2 hours before anaesthesia.

Babies having 2 hourly milk feeds – please discuss with the anaesthetist.

On-call anaesthetist: bleep 1178
Anaesthetic office (office hours): ext. 2050