

Understanding your risk

As part of the consent process, your doctor will provide you with an explanation of the possible risks and benefits of a procedure. This explanation is an essential part of ensuring that consent is “informed.” Following this explanation, you may take the information home for further consideration, or agree to sign a consent form to proceed with the treatment.

When discussing the risks of a procedure, you should consider the following points:

- the benefits and risks of health care treatment can never be absolutely guaranteed;
- a risk is important (material risk) if it influences the decision/s you make;
- the *Consent to Treatment Policy for WA Health Services* requires a health practitioner to inform you about risks with a probability of greater than 1 in 1,000. This explanation will include frequent and serious risks, as well as the short and long term (ongoing) risks.

Your doctor may use a pictorial diagram to assist him/her to explain the significance of any risks to you. One example of a pictorial diagram is the Paling Palette®, presented overleaf. The Paling Palette® tool is designed to show the number of people out of 1,000 who might be expected to experience some particular event, and, at the same time, it shows the numbers who are not likely to be affected.





An example of a pictorial tool that may be used to explain the risks involved in health care

The following example shows the risks of a woman producing a child with Down Syndrome. The odds for a 39 year old woman of producing a child with Down Syndrome or other chromosome abnormality is **12** out of 1,000 (marked in red). When explaining the risks to the patient, the doctor would fill in the relevant number of figures, explaining the positive and negative outcomes simultaneously and explaining the significance of the risk for the patient.

In order to determine the risk of your child having a chromosomal abnormality, a procedure called an amniocentesis may be performed. There is a 4 in 1,000 risk of you having a miscarriage as a result of the amniocentesis. This risk is marked in black. In order for you to decide whether to proceed with your pregnancy, you will need to consider these risks carefully.

