

SKIN SURGERY

The operation will take about twenty minutes and will be carried out under local anaesthetic (an injection to numb the skin at the operation site or nearby). Please eat and drink normally before your appointment.

We recommend that you do not drive yourself immediately after your operation. On the day, some operations impair your ability to drive, especially those near the eye or on hands and legs. It is likely that spending a few minutes sitting quietly after the procedure will be sufficient to allow you to drive home. If you have somebody with you, perhaps they could drive you home?

Some medicines affect blood clotting e.g. aspirin, warfarin, Clopidogrel, nicoumalone and phenindione.

If you are taking any of the above, please tell the doctor/nurse.

We can check your INR if you are taking warfarin – if it is above 2.5 we may not be able to operate on the same day.

Time off work is sometimes necessary. (But it depends on what part of the body is being operated on and what type of job you do – please check with the doctor about this.) You may need to rest quietly and stay indoors. Again, this will depend on the site of the operation and the nature of your work – please discuss with the doctor/nurse. For operations on the leg, we usually recommend resting with the leg raised.

You will need to keep the operation site dry for 4-7 days following the procedure – be prepared. Smoking delays healing – we advise you do not smoke for a week after the operation.

Local anaesthetic

This involves an injection, which may sting briefly before numbing the local area. The numbness will normally wear off after 2 or 3 hours.

Excision

This procedure involves cutting the skin with a blade, which is followed by closure of the wound with stitches. These stitches will need to be removed after 5 to 21 days as advised by the doctor/nurse. Your wound will then take several weeks before it is fully healed, although the redness and bumpiness of any scar takes 6 months or so to settle. If the operation is in a hairy area of skin, the hair may need to be shaved.

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A dressing will often be applied to keep the wound covered until the stitches have been removed. Sometimes dressings need to be bulky or extensive and may look unsightly – please be prepared for this. If the dressing needs replacing or becomes wet and you need assistance, please contact your nurse at your GP surgery.

You will need to arrange to have the stitches removed by your practice nurse unless advised otherwise. Some patients will have to come back to the Heavitree clinic to have stitches removed.

Following surgery, it is advisable to avoid active sport, e.g. squash, swimming, heavy lifting, running etc., until at least 3 weeks after sutures have been removed.

Some patients may require antibiotics following the procedure.

Information on side effects and risks

There are many risks and side effects associated with skin surgery. These need to be carefully weighed up against the benefits of the procedure.

Pain

Pain may be experienced following surgery. This is usually relatively mild and controlled with simple analgesics such as Paracetamol. If the pain is more severe, please seek medical advice. If the surgery has been performed near the mouth, an area of the mouth may be numb and you should be aware of this and take care when eating and drinking, particularly if the food or drink is hot as you may not be able to sense this and burning could result.

Bleeding

Bleeding may occur following the procedure. This may be minor in nature in which case firm pressure without interruption with a clean dressing will usually stop it. If it has not stopped after 10 minutes, you should seek medical advice. In the case of more serious bleeding, you should also seek urgent medical attention.

Swelling and bruising

Bruising is quite common following surgery and may be quite extensive in a few patients – it usually resolves completely without any long-term problems. If the surgery is close to the eyes then this may lead to black eyes from bruising and to partial or complete closure of the eye due to swelling. It is temporary and lasts typically for 24 to 48 hours.

Infection

Infection may occur and typically comes on 24 to 72 hours following surgery. Increased pain, redness, swelling or discharges are typical signs of infection. In the event of this, you should seek urgent medical help from your GP.

Loss of sensation

Occasionally nerve damage can result following the surgery, particularly if the tumour being excised is close to or involving a nerve. This may lead to numbness or weakness in the affected area. If the nerve is bruised then recovery will normally take place over 6 months but if the nerve has been severed, then this may be permanent. Although this is a rare complication, it is an important one to bear in mind.

Scarring

All surgery will result in a scar. We aim to minimise the scar and leave you with the best cosmetic result possible, but there is no such thing as scar-free surgery. The doctor/nurse will discuss with you at the time of your consultation the nature of the likely scarring and the end cosmetic result we could expect. The end result is variable and depends on many factors, including infection, bleeding, dehiscence (see below) and, in particular, individual variability between people, so we cannot give you a specific guarantee as to the end scar result. Whilst every endeavour of the surgery is to leave you with a neat scar, occasionally the wound stretches after removal of the stitches. This is called dehiscence of the wound. It will usually heal up, but healing is delayed because of this and regular dressings will be required. Unfortunately, in this situation the scar is usually wider than would otherwise be expected. Occasionally patients may develop a large protuberant hard scar called a keloid scar. This is more likely to occur at certain sites of the body. If you are having surgery at one of these sites, you will be advised of this. Scar maturity is usually achieved 6 months after surgery. However, it can take up to 18 months for a scar to "mature". The final cosmetic appearance of a scar is usually achieved 6 months after surgery. However, it can take up to 18 months for a scar to "mature".

Skin colour changes

Pigmentary change can occur in scars leaving either a loss of pigment and a white area or an increase in pigmentation – a dark area. Increase in pigmentation is usually temporary and resolves over a period of 3 to 6 months. Occasionally it can last longer.

Incomplete excision

Occasionally skin lesions can extend beyond what is seen on the surface at the time of surgery. In these cases, you would be offered another appointment to discuss the possible need for further surgery.

Recurrence

In rare circumstances, skin growths can reappear on the skin, even after they have been adequately removed.

Disclaimer

The information on this sheet is aimed at patient education and, as such, it does not contain reference to all risks and side effects, only those most commonly experienced.

Should you require information about these less common side effects, then please contact your GP/Nurse.