Vascular surgery

Open repair of abdominal aortic aneurysm

Information for patients leaving hospital

Aim
This information is to help answer any questions you might have now and help you to know what to expect after your operation and in the first few weeks after you return home. Please feel free to ask any of your nurses or doctors if you have questions whilst in hospital.

You can find further information regarding vascular illnesses at www.circulationfoundation.org.uk

Remember this leaflet is designed only as a guide, since everyone’s recovery is different.

Should you have any concerns after your discharge, please contact our vascular nurse specialists on 01223 596382.

What happened during the operation?
Your surgeon will have explained before and after your operation what your operation involved.

Briefly, you have had the ballooned out section of your aorta (the large blood vessel carrying blood from your heart) replaced with a special vascular graft material.

During the operation, an incision (cut) was made in your abdomen and special clamps applied to the artery, the graft material was sewn into place and the clamps then removed.

Do I have stitches?
For this operation, your surgeon may have used either sutures (stitches) or staples. Ask your doctor or nurse if you are unsure. Both sutures and staples are usually removed 12-14 days after your operation.
- **Dissolvable sutures**: your sutures might be dissolvable, in which case you will not be able to see them and do not need to have them removed.

- **Non-dissolvable sutures or staples**: if your sutures are non-dissolvable, they will be removed either before you leave hospital (on the ward) or we will arrange for your practice nurse to remove them after you return home.

**Do I need to do anything to the wound dressing?**

It is normal for this type of wound to ooze a little for a few days. If your wound is still oozing a little when you go home, do not worry - the ward will arrange for a nurse to continue to dress your wound. We will also keep an eye on it when you return to the outpatient clinic.

**When can I return to my normal activities?**

In general, if you start returning to normal activities and it causes you pain, stop and avoid the particular activity for another one to two weeks and then try again.

- **Exercise and mobility**: try taking a short walk at least once a day, and keep as mobile as you can by gentle activities around the house. This will help your recovery and your general health.

- **Strenuous activities**: you should avoid strenuous activities for about four to six weeks. We suggest that can resume sex after about six weeks, or when you feel comfortable to do so.

- **Driving**: you should avoid driving for about four to six weeks. For your safety, make sure you can safely carry out an emergency stop before you resume driving.

- **Returning to work or study**: please ask your doctor when it will be safe for you to return to your work/ study. It will depend on what you do, how fast you are recovering and your general health.

**What about medicines after I leave the hospital…**

Please continue taking your usual medications unless you have been told otherwise. You might have been given the following medicines to take after you leave hospital:

- **Antibiotics**: these are to prevent or treat infection. It is always very important that you complete the course of antibiotics. If you have problems in taking them, contact your GP who can advise.

- **Anti-platelet agents**: (aspirin/ clopidogrel)/ cholesterol lowering tablets (statins): These might have been prescribed for you by your hospital doctor or
your GP. You might have started them while you were staying in hospital or after you left. They can help to protect you from heart attacks and strokes so you should take them for as long as your doctor tells you, which can be for the rest of your life. If you have problems taking them, for example side effects, please contact your GP who can offer you advice and maybe some alternatives.

- **Painkillers**: If we have given you some stronger painkillers to take home with you, please take them as directed. Most patients find they can stop taking them soon after leaving hospital - maybe changing to their usual 'over the counter' tablets. If you are worried, please contact your GP for advice and help.

**I am feeling constipated so, what can I do?**
A common side effect of 'stronger than usual' painkillers is constipation. If you can, try to swap to less strong ones as soon as you can.

To avoid becoming constipated, try to drink plenty of fluids (for example water), and eat as much fibre as you can, especially fruit and vegetables. Keeping active can also help.

All of these will be good for your recovery and general health. If this does not help your constipation, please contact your GP for advice and help.

**How about washing?**
You may take your usual shower or bath after a week once your wound is dry. However, do not soak your wound for a long period of time, and try to avoid using perfumed soaps etc because they can irritate wounds.

Make sure you dry the wound area carefully after washing so as to help it heal.

**I feel very tired after the surgery, should I be worried?**
You have had a major operation, which is stressful for your body. It can take anytime up to six months to start to feel like yourself again. However, you should start to feel some improvement after six weeks. Rest when you feel tired.

**Why do I need to return to your outpatient clinic?**
You will have one appointment at approximately six to eight weeks after your surgery to check that you have recovered from your surgery. If all is well we will not need to see you again.

**What should I look out for after I return home?**
If your leg suddenly becomes painful, goes white or feels cold, or numb please come to the emergency department (A&E/ casualty) at Addenbrooke’s straight away. We will assess you at once in case you need to be given some additional treatment. This is the same for all patients who have had a graft/ stent inserted.
If you experience a gradual onset of pain when walking, please see your GP.

If your wound becomes painful, red or inflamed looking it may be infected. You should make an appointment with your GP.

**Why have you told me to stop/ cut down my smoking?**

Smoking is very bad for the health of your blood vessels; it damages the arterial lining which allows the build up of plaque that can block the arteries therefore reducing the flow of blood.

Giving up smoking (or cutting right down) is one of the best things you can do for your health.

**I am struggling to give up smoking, where can I get some help?**

There are many more ways in which you can be helped to stop smoking. For example there are new medications and other new ways of helping you. Please do not think you are on your own.

See the end of this information for useful contact numbers. Your GP practice is a very good place to start.

**Contacts for help to stop smoking:**

- Camquit is a local 'stop smoking' specialist service; you can contact them directly or through your GP practice. Their telephone number is:
  
  - Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire 01223 723022
  
  - East Cambridgeshire and Fenland 0800 018 4304
  
  - Huntingdonshire 01480 418693
  
  - Website: [www.camquit.nhs.uk](http://www.camquit.nhs.uk). If you wish we can refer you to them.

- There is also a national NHS Stop Smoking Helpline: 0800 169 0 169 (textphone: 0800 169 0 171) and website: [www.givingupsmoking.co.uk](http://www.givingupsmoking.co.uk)

- You can also pick up copies of the free 'Giving it up for life' booklet from the Information Centre at Addenbrooke's. This has a lot of useful advice, attractively presented.
Privacy and dignity

Same sex bays and bathrooms are offered in all wards except critical care and theatre recovery areas where the use of high-tech equipment and/or specialist one to one care is required.

We are a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language or audio, please contact Interpreting services on telephone: 01223 256998, or email: interpreting@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

For Large Print information please contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk