Dermatology department

Pre-operative advice for patients who are due to have skin surgery

One of the doctors or nurses in the dermatology department will have explained to you that you need to have a small operation to remove a skin lesion or to obtain a sample of skin. This leaflet explains the operation and answers some frequently asked questions.

After your operation you will receive a different leaflet providing information on wound care, stitch removal and getting results.

**What should I do before the operation?**

If you are **pregnant**, please contact the clinic for advice.

If you are taking **warfarin** please arrange for an INR blood test five days before your operation. INR results are given as a number (for example 2.1). If your INR result is 2.5 or less you need take no action. If the INR is above 2.5 please phone the result to the clinic straight away by ringing (01223 216091). It may be necessary to postpone your operation if the reading is too high.

If you are taking **aspirin** or **clopidogrel** prescribed regularly for your heart or circulation; or an oral anticoagulant (eg **rivaroxaban/dabigatran**) you will probably not be advised to stop the tablets, but please discuss this with your doctor.

Avoid non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (such as Nurofen®), aspirin (unless prescribed - see note above) and all aspirin-containing medicines for seven days prior to and for two days after your surgery.

**What should I do on the day of the operation? What should I bring with me?**

Please bring a list of your current medications with you on the day of your operation.

On the day of surgery please take any regular medications (unless you have been told otherwise) and eat a light breakfast or lunch. We suggest you wear loose fitting, comfortable clothes. You may wish to have a friend or relative to accompany you, although they are not routinely permitted to be in the operating theatre during the operation. You may also wish to bring a magazine or book to read as operations sometimes take longer than anticipated, resulting in delays.

All operations will take place in one of the theatres in Clinic 7, Level 3, Addenbrooke’s Hospital. Please report to the Clinic Reception Desk when you arrive.

If you have a **pacemaker** you must inform the doctor before the operation starts.

Unfortunately staff in the clinic are unable to take care of any children while you have treatment. We suggest that either you make alternative arrangements for childcare or someone else comes to the unit with you.
What kind of operation am I having?
The type of operation will be discussed with you in clinic, and details of the operations are given below.

Before the operation we will ask you to sign a consent form.

All operations will be carried out under local anaesthetic so that you will be awake throughout and able to talk to us. The local anaesthetic will numb the area being operated on so you should feel no pain.

Types of operation:

Punch biopsy (approx. 20 minutes)
- A three to four mm circle of skin is removed from the rash or lesion.
- The wound is sutured with one to two stitches or allowed to heal over.

Incisional biopsy (approx. 20 minutes)
- A small ellipse (oval) of skin is removed from part of the rash or lesion.
- The wound is sutured with a few stitches (usually no more than five).

Curettage (scraping) or shave biopsy (approx. 20 minutes)
- The lesion is scraped off or shaved off using a very sharp blade, leaving a graze or a small depression in the skin.
- The bleeding is stopped using an electric cautery machine. This procedure does not require stitches.

Excision of skin lesion (approx. 40 minutes)
- A whole skin lesion is removed with a margin of normal skin around the edge.
- The bleeding is stopped using an electric cautery machine.
- There will be several stitches both above and below the skin surface.

Local anaesthesia is usually effective for about two hours. The wound often feels tender after this time. Paracetamol tablets may be taken for pain relief if necessary unless advised otherwise.

What should I do or not do after the operation? Can I drive home afterwards?

Although some people are able to drive themselves home after surgery, we suggest that the majority of patients have a companion to escort them home. Patients should not drive after surgery to the central face area. Ideally, patients who are having an excision should not cycle to or from their appointment.

Depending on the procedure performed you may have a number of stitches and a dressing. You will need to keep the wound and dressing dry for 48 hours. This may make it difficult to have a bath or a shower during this time.

Any stitches will usually require removal either with the nurse in your GP’s Practice or in the hospital clinic between five and 14 days after the procedure. Please let us know prior to your operation if you anticipate that this may be a problem.

You should avoid activities such as swimming, other strenuous exercise, bending, straining or lifting heavy objects for 14 days following the procedure.
Smoking has been shown to have an adverse effect on wound healing after surgery. We would therefore recommend that you do not smoke for one week after your operation.

**Does the operation carry any risks?**

**Bleeding**

It is normal for a small amount of blood to come through the dressing. Any heavier bleeding can be stopped by applying firm pressure to the dressing for 15 minutes. If bleeding continues, you should contact your GP or this department.

**Infection**

Rarely a wound can become infected, and this will show up as increased pain, swelling and redness of the wound after a few days. If you are concerned that the wound has become infected, please contact your GP or this department for advice.

**Scarring**

The stitch line is likely to be red initially but this redness usually fades over a period of weeks to months. You will be left with a permanent scar in the area, the length and width of which depends on the type of operation performed.

**Contacts/Further information**

Should you have any questions about your procedure, please feel free to ask us when you attend for treatment or you may contact the surgery booking office on 01223 216091.

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We are now 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.

**Help with this leaflet:**

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

**Document history**

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