

Patient Information Leaflet

Information prior to having a skin biopsy or skin excision

Produced By: The Beacon Centre

Date: December 2013
Review due: December 2016



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Eating and Drinking

You may eat and drink as usual prior to your operation.

Clothing

Normal clothing may be worn, however you may be asked to replace some of your clothing with a theatre gown. This will give the doctor or nurse better access to the area being operated on and will protect your own clothing.

Waiting Area

A maximum of one relative or friend can accompany the patient, this is due to the limited space available. We have no facilities for children if they are accompanying the patient.

Appointment

Every patient is given an appointment time. Try to arrive on time, but not more than 10 to 15 minutes early. Every effort is made to see patients at the appointment time, but inevitably delays sometimes occur. Please bring a book or newspaper with you to help you pass the time.

Valuables

Please do not bring any valuables with you when you attend as we cannot be held responsible for any loss which might occur. Please keep jewellery to a minimum.

Medication

Please bring a list of any current medication with you when you attend and tell the nurse on the reception desk if you have a pacemaker or a heart problem. If you take Warfarin please inform the department immediately and provide them with a contact number. This is because of the increased risk of bleeding during and after surgery. The Doctor will need to discuss your Warfarin dose regime with you. If you require an interpreter because of language difficulties please inform us. If you are having treatment to your face please remove make-up before you attend.

Cancellation or Re-arrangement of Appointment

If you are unable to attend or no longer need your appointment then please telephone 01983 552590 and let us know. This will enable another patient to take your place.

What is being done and why?

A skin biopsy is the removal of a small piece of skin. This is done to confirm or establish a diagnosis so that further treatment can be planned or reassurance given. Skin excision is removal of a skin lump in order to either make a diagnosis or as part of treatment. The reason for your surgery will have been explained to you by the doctor or nurse.

Will I feel anything?

A local anaesthetic will be used. This means that you will have an injection into the skin at the site of the biopsy before surgery. The injection will sting initially. However once the anaesthetic has taken effect your skin will be numb, although you may feel pulling or tugging. You will be awake throughout the procedure and will not be sedated or feel drowsy.

How long will it take?

Usually between 20 to 40 minutes. Some complex or larger procedures may take longer.

Who will do the procedure?

Skin biopsies or excisions are done by a Dermatology Consultant, Dermatology GP or Nurse Specialist who is trained in skin surgery.

What happens to the piece of skin that has been removed?

In most cases, the piece of skin removed will be analysed in the laboratory and looked at down the microscope. The process usually takes 1 to 2 weeks. Your doctor will then know whether the diagnosis has been confirmed or if other possibilities have to be considered.

Occasionally further biopsies or surgery will be required.

What happens after the biopsy?

In order to take the biopsy the skin will be cut or scraped. This will leave a wound. In some instances the wound will be stitched (sutured). On others it will be left as an open wound rather like a graze.

If stitches are used these will have to be removed by the practice nurse at your own surgery 1 to 2 weeks later. You must be sure to be available for this to be done (e.g. not on holiday) before the procedure is organised. After stitch removal the wound is weak and will have to be treated carefully to prevent the wound breaking down.

In most cases a dressing will be required and this will have to be kept clean and dry. In some instances the dressing can be removed after a few days and the wound washed in the shower. The nurse or doctor will advise.

If the wound is on your lower leg you should be prepared after the procedure to rest with your leg elevated for the first 24 hours. You may be advised not to walk more than 400 metres within this time.

What are the risks of a skin biopsy or excision?

When the local anaesthetic wears off (around 1 to 2 hours later) the wound will be painful and there may be some limitation of movement. It depends on where the wound is and how big it is, whether this discomfort will be significant or just a minor hindrance. Paracetamol tablets may be required for the pain. The discomfort should start to reduce after 3 to 4 days. If the pain gets worse after 4 days it usually means there is an infection and you should seek medical help.

The skin around the wound will be swollen. This normally lasts for 3 to 4 days depending on the nature, size and site of the procedure. Bruising is also common and lasts 5 to 7 days.

Because the skin has been cut there could be a risk of infection of the wound. This is particularly the case if a dressing is applied and this is allowed to get wet. If the dressing is soiled or becomes wet it will need to be removed. Wet dressings make infections more likely.

As with any cut or skin injury there is always a risk of bleeding. For this reason a dressing is usually required and you will be instructed how to deal with such an eventuality. It will be

necessary to restrict your activity in the days following the procedure. Vigorous exercise may stretch the wound causing it to bleed or burst. Seek medical help if this happens.

You will certainly have a scar following the procedure although it may not be very noticeable. Each case is different and depends on a number of factors including the nature of the procedure, the site and your age. If there is a danger of structures such as nerves or tear ducts being cut or injured during the procedure these possibilities will be discussed with you by the staff member doing the procedure.

Allergic reactions to dressings, rubber gloves, skin antiseptic solutions, local anaesthetics are very unusual. Make sure you tell the doctor if you know you are allergic to any of these items.

Follow-up Appointment

Follow-up appointments with the dermatology clinic will be sent to you in the post. You will also be given further information regarding your wound care. Most patients will be able to leave the surgical unit immediately after their operation. Usual recommendations are for:

1. Removal of sutures with own practice nurse 7-10 days post-op.

How will I hear about the outcome of this procedure?

It usually takes 3 weeks for the skin specimen to be examined and a report issued by the laboratory. The ideal time to phone will be between 3 and 4 weeks post-operation but a letter will be sent to you with the result or a follow up appointment.

Any other questions?

If you have any other questions please do not hesitate to speak to the nurse or doctor before leaving the department.

Website information: www.bad.org.uk – this website provides well written patient information on a range of dermatological subjects.

Smoking cigarettes reduces blood flow to the skin so the wound may not heal properly leaving a worse scab than usually expected. Smokers are strongly advised to stop smoking 2 weeks before the operation and for at least 2 weeks after the operation. You can get help to stop smoking from your GP or smoking cessation service.

If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format, please contact the Quality Team, telephone 01983 534850, who will advise you.

Valuables should not be brought into the hospital. If patients have to bring in valuable items they should ask a nurse to store them safely and request a receipt for the items. You may not be able to have the valuable items returned if the time of discharge from hospital is out of hours.

We are sorry but the Trust cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to items not given for safe keeping.

You can get further information on all sorts of health issues through NHS interactive available through Sky TV or online at: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>

For Health advice and out of hours GP service please call the NHS 111 service on: 111

We Value Your Views On Our Service

If you wish to comment on the care which you, your relative or friend has received, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please speak to the person in charge of the ward, clinic or service in the first instance or ask them to contact the Quality Team. If you wish to contact them directly, telephone on 534850.

Alternatively you may prefer to write to:

Chief Executive
Isle Of Wight NHS Trust
St Mary's Hospital
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 5TG

All NHS sites are no smoking areas.

If you would like help and advice to stop smoking please call: Freephone 0800 169 0 169 to talk to the NHS Smoking Helpline.

Ref: **BC/SBSE/01**