

Patient Information Leaflet: Skin Surgery

Introduction

Skin surgery is a procedure to remove or treat lesions on the skin. This may be done for medical reasons (such as the removal of cancerous or pre-cancerous lesions) or for cosmetic reasons. Understanding the process, risks, and recovery can help you feel more prepared for your surgery.

Common Reasons for Skin Surgery

1. **Benign Lesions:** Moles, cysts, lipomas, warts, or seborrheic keratoses that may cause discomfort or cosmetic concerns.
2. **Pre-cancerous Lesions:** Actinic keratosis, which has the potential to develop into skin cancer.
3. **Malignant Lesions:** Skin cancers like **basal cell carcinoma**, **squamous cell carcinoma**, or **melanoma** that require prompt removal to prevent spread.

Types of Skin Surgery

1. **Excisional Surgery:** The lesion is cut out with a margin of healthy skin.
2. **Shave Excision:** A technique where the lesion is shaved off the surface of the skin.
3. **Cryotherapy:** Freezing the lesion with liquid nitrogen, often used for pre-cancerous or benign lesions.
4. **Curettage and Electrodesiccation:** Scraping off the lesion followed by cauterizing to destroy remaining cells.

Before Your Surgery

- **Consultation:** Your doctor will examine the lesion and discuss the surgery options with you. They may perform a biopsy to determine the nature of the lesion.
- **Medications:** Let your doctor know about any medications or supplements you take, as some may need to be stopped before surgery (e.g., blood thinners).
- **Anaesthesia:** Most skin surgeries are done under **local anaesthesia**, meaning you will be awake but the area will be numb.

On the Day of Surgery

- **Preparation:** The area around the lesion will be cleaned, and local anaesthesia will be injected to numb the site.
- **The Procedure:** Depending on the type of surgery, the doctor will remove the lesion and may stitch the area closed.
- **Duration:** Procedures typically last between 15 minutes to 1 hour, depending on complexity.

Aftercare

- **Wound Care:** Keep the area clean and dry, following the doctor's instructions on changing dressings.

- **Pain Relief:** Mild discomfort is normal. Over-the-counter painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen can help.
- **Stitches:** If used, stitches may need to be removed after 5-14 days. Your doctor will inform you of when these need to be removed.
- **Avoid Sun Exposure:** Protect the healing area from the sun to minimize scarring and changes to pigmentation.

Potential risks

As with any surgical procedure, there are potential risks:

- **Scarring:** Some scarring is inevitable, but it should fade over time.
- **Infection:** Signs include increased redness, swelling, warmth, or discharge. If you notice these symptoms, contact your doctor.
- **Bleeding:** Small amounts of bleeding are normal, but if it continues, seek medical advice.
- **Pain and Discomfort:** Pain at the surgery site is usually mild and resolves within a few days, though it may be more intense for deeper procedures.
- **Allergic Reactions:** Some people may experience an allergic reaction to the local anaesthetic or dressings used.
- **Delayed Healing:** Factors such as diabetes, poor circulation, or smoking can lead to slower healing and increased risk of infection.
- **Nerve Damage:** Minor nerve damage is rare but may occur, especially if the lesion is near sensitive areas. It can cause numbness or tingling around the surgical site.
- **Recurrence of the Lesion:** Some benign or pre-cancerous lesions may regrow if they were not entirely removed, especially in the case of conditions like cysts or warts.
- **Changes in Skin Colour (Pigmentation):** The skin around the surgery site may darken or lighten, particularly for individuals with darker skin tones.

Follow up

You may need a follow-up appointment to check the wound or remove stitches.

When to seek help

Contact your doctor if:

- The wound becomes red, swollen, or starts leaking pus.
- You develop a fever.
- The wound reopens or fails to heal.

Skin surgery is a common and generally safe procedure to remove lesions for both medical and cosmetic reasons. Understanding the surgery process, taking proper care of your wound, and attending follow-up appointments are key to ensuring the best outcomes. Always reach out to your healthcare provider if you have concerns or notice unusual symptoms during recovery.

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