

# Having a minor skin operation

## Information for patients

This sheet answers common questions about your minor (small) operation for your skin problem. This may involve removal of a small sample of skin that will aid with making a diagnosis and/or removal of a skin lesion. Skin lesions are areas of skin that are growing abnormally or look different to the surrounding skin.

If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to ask your nurse or doctor.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions in the hospital, there may be a limitation on the number of relatives or friends accompanying you for all or part of the procedure. Please only bring someone with you if you have a clinical need, for example if you have a carer, and avoid bringing children where possible. Please ask your nurse or doctor if you have any queries.

## Before the operation

Please avoid alcohol for 48 hours before and after your minor operation and do not smoke for one to two weeks before and after to promote good wound healing. Please visit our website for more advice if you are interested in stopping smoking:

[www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/stop-smoking](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/stop-smoking).

If you are taking any blood thinning medications such as antithrombotic/anticoagulants, you will be given advice at the time of your minor surgery appointment on when to stop any required medications.

In general, if you are taking warfarin, please ensure your warfarin blood level (INR) is checked 24 to 48 hours before the date of the procedure. Your INR Level must be 2.5 or below for the procedure to take place.

Please contact your anticoagulation clinic (or the blood test unit) to arrange the test and inform them about the surgery. If your INR level is higher than 2.5, please contact the surgical bookings team to reschedule your procedure on:

**Barnet Hospital:** 020 8216 5423 or 020 8216 4279

**Royal Free Hospital:** 0207 794 0500 extension 39601 or 33326

If you are taking apixaban, rivaroxaban, edoxaban or fondaparinux sodium, these need to be stopped at least 24 hours before the procedure. Aspirin and clopidogrel do not usually need to be stopped before minor surgery but your doctor or nurse will advise you. They will also tell you when to restart any medicines after your procedure.

## **On the day of the operation**

On the day of your procedure please eat and drink normally.

You can drive yourself or take public transport to and from the hospital on the day of your minor operation. However, if you are due to have surgery on your face, hands or feet, the dressings after surgery may impede your vision, and may make it difficult to use your hands or feet. In these cases, it is advisable for someone to drive you home.

Please bring a list of all the medications that you are taking with you to the minor operation clinic and inform the doctor who is carrying out your procedure if:

- You are allergic to any medicines (you may need to check this with your GP).
- You have ever had any problems with local anaesthetic injections (for instance at the dentist), or if you are prone to fainting.
- You are allergic to latex, rubber or sticking plasters.
- You have a heart pacemaker or any electrical implants. This is important as we often use electrical equipment to reduce bleeding during minor operations.

Please note that the doctor or nurse who carries out your minor operation may not be the same as the clinician who saw you in clinic and requested the procedure.

## **What happens during the operation?**

Before your minor operation, the procedure will be explained to you in clear terms and you will be asked to sign a consent form giving your permission for the operation to be carried out. We will also confirm that any risks and benefits of the procedure have been discussed with you.

You will then be asked to lie down on the operation couch. The operating doctor will clean your skin with a disinfectant solution. A local anaesthetic which numbs the skin will then be injected into the skin around the area that is being operated on using a fine needle. The local anaesthetic only numbs the affected area and does not put you to sleep. The local anaesthetic blocks any painful sensations, but you may feel pressure to the area of your procedure.

When the clinician is sure that the skin is numb and you cannot feel any pain, the procedure will begin. If at any point you feel any pain, let your clinician know. The procedure commonly lasts between 20-30 minutes, but can take up to an hour.

Once the sample of skin has been taken, your wound will be closed either with stitches, sealed with cautery (a heating/burning technique), staples or skin glue. Occasionally, the wound is left to heal naturally with appropriate care given by our specialist nurses.

A dressing or plaster is then applied to the area of your procedure and you will be able to go home on the same day.

## **After your operation**

You will be given a letter for the practice nurse at your GP surgery explaining the details of your procedure and if any stitches need to be removed. Your stitches will need to stay in place for between seven to 14 days before being removed at your GP surgery. You will need to make this appointment yourself.

If you have received self-dissolving stitches during your procedure, these do not need to be removed.

We will also write to you and your GP with the results of your minor operation which usually takes up to eight weeks. Once we receive the histology results, we may decide that we need to see you again in the dermatology clinic. Details of any further appointments will be sent to you.

## **Caring for your wound**

Your wound site usually needs to be covered for 24 to 48 hours. Sometimes you will be instructed to leave the dressing on for longer (particularly with larger facial procedures). It is usually best to leave a wound uncovered if possible. Some wounds require a covering for longer periods, your doctor or nurse will give you precise instructions on wound care after your operation.

We advise that you avoid any exercise for at least one to two weeks after the procedure. You can have a bath or shower within 24 to 48 hours after your minor operation, but it is advisable to keep the dressing dry.

Once you have been instructed to remove the dressing, you can gently wash the wound with clean soapy water or cooled pre-boiled water. Soap or Dermol 500 can be used to wash the wound if needed.

We suggest that you avoid swimming until after all your stitches have been removed or have dissolved.

## **Common side effects**

Minor operations on the skin are straightforward procedures and commonly undertaken. During the procedure, you may experience the following:

- A stinging feeling as the local anaesthetic injection is given which usually lasts for several seconds.
- There is usually some bleeding during a minor operation which will be reduced with cautery (sealing the skin by a heating/burning technique). There is also a small risk of bleeding after the procedure. The risk of bleeding is greater if you are taking medication to thin the blood.

After the procedure, you may experience the following:

- Some bruising and swelling which will resolve with time.
- The site of the procedure will be tender for several days after your surgery but this will lessen as healing progresses.
- There will be a scar where a cut in the skin has been made. Scars are permanent, but most fade over time.

Some people form lumpy scars called hypertrophic or keloid scars as their wound heals. Keloid scars are more likely to form on certain parts of the body and in certain types of skin. The doctor will discuss this with you when you attend the minor operations clinic.

There is always a general risk of infection if the skin is cut. A wound that is infected may have excessive yellowish or clear discharge or may become redder and more uncomfortable. Infected wounds often become more painful with time, rather than less uncomfortable. If you are worried about infection, you should contact your GP or the clinic where you had your operation using the phone numbers below.

### **Where will my procedure take place?**

Minor operations are carried out at different hospital sites across the trust. Please check your appointment letter for which clinic you should attend.

### **Do you have any further questions?**

If you have any further questions, please contact using the following information:

#### **Royal Free Hospital**

The minor operations clinic is situated in clinic six, level one.

If you need to speak to one of our team, call 020 7794 0500, extension 39601, 33326 or the clinical nurse specialist nurse on bleep 1454.

Or you can email: [rf-tr.royalfreedermatologypatientqueries@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.royalfreedermatologypatientqueries@nhs.net)

#### **Barnet Hospital and Chase Farm Hospital**

If you have any questions about your appointment or you need to cancel or change it for any reason, you can contact with Barnet or Chase Farm Hospitals on: 020 8216 5423 or 020 8216 4279.

If your appointment is at a Chase Farm Hospital clinic, email: [rf-tr.chasefarmdermatologypatientqueries@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.chasefarmdermatologypatientqueries@nhs.net)

If your appointment is at a Barnet Hospital clinic, email: [rf-tr.barnetdermatologypatientqueries@nhs.net](mailto:rf-tr.barnetdermatologypatientqueries@nhs.net)

#### **E-mail address for photographs**

If you have been asked to forward a photograph following your initial consultation, please forward them together with your name, date of birth and hospital number (the **MRN** on your appointment letter) to: [rf.patientsphotographs@nhs.net](mailto:rf.patientsphotographs@nhs.net)

#### **More information**

For more information about the dermatology service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website: [www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/dermatology](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/dermatology)

#### **Your feedback**

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email: [rf.communications@nhs.net](mailto:rf.communications@nhs.net)

#### **Alternative formats**

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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Service: Dermatology  
Version number: 1  
Approval date: July 2021  
Review date: July 2023  
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