

Dermatology Department Contact Numbers

Monday – Thursday: 9am - 5pm; Friday: 9am - 1pm
After hours, contact Out-of-hours GP or local Emergency Department

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|---------------------------|--|--|
| Southern HSCT | Craigavon Area Hospital | 028 3756 5950 / 028 3756 5959 |
| | Daisy Hill Hospital - Day case theatre 1 | 028 3756 4843 On Monday AM only |
| South Eastern HSCT | Ulster Hospital - Ward 25 | 028 9048 4511 |
| | Lagan Valley Hospital | 028 9250 1280 |
| | Downe Hospital | 028 4483 8298 |
| | Bangor Hospital | 028 9147 5102 |
| Belfast HSCT | Royal Victoria Hospital | 028 9615 0398 |
| | Belfast City Hospital - Wing D | 028 9504 1068 / 028 9504 1069 |
| | Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children | 028 9024 0503 |
| Northern HSCT | Causeway Hospital | 023 7034 6040 |
| | Antrim Hospital | 028 9442 4017 |
| | Whiteabbey Hospital | 028 9055 2422 |
| | Braid Valley Hospital | 028 2563 5201 |

Skin Surgery Under Local Anaesthetic

Information for Patients

Dermatology Department

This document will give you information about skin surgery procedure/s and potential complications, to help you make an informed decision. There may also be risks of choosing not to have treatment or other available methods of treatment.

If you are unsure or require further information, please consult with your healthcare team.

Types of skin surgery

A member of the dermatology team will tick the procedure that is relevant to you on this occasion.

What is a Punch biopsy?

A punch biopsy is a minor surgical procedure carried out to remove a small circular sample of skin, between 3mm and 8mm in diameter. Usually these are performed either to help confirm the diagnosis of a rash, to remove, or sample a lesion.



Local anaesthetic is injected into the surrounding skin. This is usually the most uncomfortable part of the procedure, and you will feel stinging for 1-2 minutes. The practitioner will check to ensure the area is numb before carrying out the biopsy. It is normal to feel some pressure during the procedure. Most wounds will require stitches. A dressing will usually be applied. The procedure generally takes 15-30 mins.

A further procedure to remove the rest of the lesion may be required at a later stage.

What is an Excision?

It is a surgical procedure used to remove a skin lesion or scar. A rim of normal skin will also be taken to ensure that the lesion is removed in its entirety, and to reduce the risk of recurrence. This means that the scar is usually around 3 times the length of the original lesion.

Notes for me:

Remember to organise Suture removal

Today you have undergone a procedure called:

You have _____ stitches/sutures on the surface of your wound.

Date of suture removal: _____

- Please contact your own GP surgery to set up an appointment with the practice nurse for this.

Local anaesthetic is injected into the skin. You will feel stinging for 1-2 minutes. The practitioner will check to ensure the area is numb before proceeding. It is normal to feel some pressure or tugging during the procedure. A hyfrecator (cautery) may be used to stop any bleeding. Most wounds will require stitches to close them, and you will be advised after the procedure when to get these removed. A dressing will usually be applied. The procedure generally takes 30 mins – 1 hour.

If the skin in the area is already quite tight (eg. over the shin, scalp) it may not be possible to use stitches to close the wound. In this case a dressing will be applied, and the wound left to heal naturally over 4 - 6 weeks.



What is Curettage and Cautery / Shave Excision?

This is a minor surgical procedure done under local anaesthetic. Once the area is numb, the skin lesion is scraped away (curettage) or shaved off (shave excision) from the surface of the skin. The raw area may be treated with cautery (heat), hyfrecation (electric current) or a chemical to stop bleeding.

The wound will initially appear as a dark area like a burn or scab. Most wounds will NOT require stitches. A dressing will usually be applied. The procedure generally takes 15-30 mins.



What are the potential risks of skin surgery?

Bleeding and Bruising

Bleeding from the wound can also occur after you get home, but is usually managed by applying pressure over the wound. Bruising is common (especially around the eyes) and may be visible for several days after the procedure. A haematoma is a collection of blood under the wound which may need to be drained.

Pain

This is usually not severe but may vary according to the location of your surgery. The initial injection of local anaesthetic will cause a stinging sensation for a short period before numbing the site of surgery. This numbing effect will wear off within a few hours following your procedure and you may wish to take suitable painkillers eg. Paracetamol as directed.

Infection

This happens with around 5% of procedures. The risk may be slightly higher if you smoke, have diabetes or are immunosuppressed.

It is important to keep the wound clean to reduce the risk of infection. Infected wounds have a greater chance of breaking down and can result in a more unsightly scar.

Stitches / Sutures

You will have been informed if sutures have been used.

Depending on the procedure required, stitches may be placed in the deep layers of the skin to help close the wound. The body usually dissolves these over a period of weeks to months although sometimes can push these stitches out from the wound. If this occurs, please contact the Dermatology department for advice.

Stitches are placed frequently on the surface of the skin to support wound closure. Occasionally marks left behind from these stitches can be visible.

How do I look after my surgical wound?

- The local anaesthetic will wear off 1-2 hours after the procedure. You may feel some discomfort which usually responds well to paracetamol. Ibuprofen and other similar painkillers should be avoided if possible as they increase the risk of bleeding. **Do NOT take paracetamol and co-codamol together.**
- After surgery on the head or face, avoid leaning forward and use an extra pillow at night. After surgery on a limb, elevate the limb when possible.
- Rest after the surgery. It is advisable to avoid strenuous physical activity while any stitches are in place and for 2-3 weeks after their removal. Avoid swimming till after suture removal.
- You may see a small amount of blood through the dressing. If this continues, apply firm continuous pressure using a clean cloth directly over the wound dressing for about 15 minutes. If the bleeding still continues or you are concerned, reapply the pressure and seek medical advice.
- **Keep the wound and/or dressing clean and dry for 24-48 hours.** During this period you only need to change the dressing if it becomes wet or falls off. Thereafter you can gently remove or soak off the dressing.
- There may be bruising, swelling and a small amount of tenderness around the wound edges which should improve over a few days. If the wound becomes increasingly red or painful, this could be a sign of infection, so consult your GP or dermatologist promptly as you may need a course of antibiotics.
- Avoid alcohol and smoking as these will slow wound healing.
- The scar will initially be red and raised but usually reduces in colour and size over several months. Occasionally, the scar may remain thickened and raised – massaging the scar daily with clean Vaseline may help.
- Use a broad-spectrum sunblock (SPF 30 or higher) on your scar for at least 18 months after surgery. If you have facial scars, wear a hat to shade your face. This should protect your scar from burning or tanning.

Patient Check List on day of surgery ✓

- Please eat and drink as normal.
- Please take your usual medication unless otherwise instructed.
- Please bring a **list of your medication** with you and inform staff if you are taking aspirin, clopidogrel (Plavix), warfarin, apixaban, rivaroxaban, edoxaban, insulin or any immunosuppressants.
- Please inform staff if you have a pacemaker or other heart device.
- Please bring any photos you may have of the site of surgery.
- Please inform staff if you have any known allergies or previous issues with local anaesthetic.
- Driving advice may be given depending on the procedure
- Allow at least 2 hours for your visit.
- You may not be able to return to work on the day of surgery and should avoid strenuous exercise.
- Ensure you will be available to have the sutures removed 7 - 14 days later.

Wound Breakdown (Dehiscence)

Wounds can breakdown or reopen (dehiscence) before or after your stitches are removed. This can happen more often if there is tension at the surgical site, particularly following movement or exercise. It could also develop due to an infection. If this occurs, please contact the Dermatology department for advice. It is not always necessary to re-suture a wound that has opened after a procedure, as it may heal better in these circumstances by itself.

Damage to muscle and nerves

Removal of a skin lesion may also result in damage to surrounding or deeper structures, such as muscle or nerves. This may be necessary to fully remove a deeply growing lesion. If this occurs, you might experience numbness, pins and needles and on rare occasions severe pain. Usually, this will resolve over a period of approximately 12 months as surrounding nerve branches grow in the area. Surgery on the face could lead to undesired pulling on the skin and surrounding area. If such a problem develops then further treatment may be considered.

Recurrence

When a lesion is removed there is the possibility that it might reappear at the surgical site. If this occurs then please seek medical advice.

Unightly Cosmetic Result

The appearance of the healed surgical site varies, depending on the type of surgery and its site. Every effort will be made to make the scar as neat as possible but you should be aware that in some cases the scar might be prominent. This will usually depend on how well your wound heals after surgery. Occasionally further treatment might be possible to improve the appearance of a very prominent scar.

- **Keloid Scars**

In some people, excessive scar tissue grows, forming a smooth hard scar. This type of keloid scar can be larger than the original wound. They can be pink, red, skin-coloured or darker than the surrounding skin and are more likely to occur on the chest, back, shoulders, earlobes, and cheeks. However, keloids can affect any part of the body.

- **Hypertrophic Scars**

Like keloid scars, hypertrophic scars are the result of excess scar tissue growth. Unlike keloid scars, hypertrophic scars don't extend beyond the boundary of the original wound, but they may continue to thicken for up to six months. These scars are red and raised to start with, before becoming flatter and paler over the course of several years.

- **Gaping Scars**

Gaping scars appear stretched and wide. The risk of these can be reduced by limiting movements that might stretch the wound, such as vigorous exercise, particularly within the first month of wound healing.

- **Colour**

Scars heal over a period of several months. Initially they may be deep red/ purple in colour before turning paler over time. Scars often appear paler than normal skin but can also be darker or pigmented. Your scar may be very sensitive to sunlight and can burn easily. It may also darken if exposed to excessive sunlight.

What happens on the day of surgery?

- On arrival you will be escorted to the surgical theatre to meet your surgical team. The procedure will be described.
- You will be asked to clarify your **medical history, medication and allergies**. Please bring details of these.
- If you are eligible and happy to proceed, you will be asked to sign a consent form.
- You may be asked to change into a gown and to remove any jewellery and nail varnish.
- Local anaesthetic injection will be used to numb the skin prior to starting the procedure.
- With some larger procedures you may be monitored post-operatively.
- If sutures are used, you will be advised a date for suture removal, which is generally 7 – 14 days post-operatively.
- All lesions removed or skin samples will be sent to the laboratory for analysis under the microscope. It may take several weeks for your histology results to be processed. **Secretaries and nursing staff cannot give out results.**
- A review appointment will be sent by post if required.

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