

**This document is intended for information purposes only and should be used in conjunction with the advice and further details to be discussed by Mr. Ahmed at your consultation meeting.**

**What are skin lesions?**

Skin lesions are found on or just below the skin. Examples of skin lesions are epidermoid cysts (also called epidermal inclusion cysts or sebaceous cysts), lipomata (plural of lipoma), skin tags and moles. These are usually not life-threatening but your surgeon can remove your skin lesion if you want. You may simply leave the skin lesion alone if your surgeon is certain it is benign (not a cancer).

It is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not. This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you make an informed decision.

If you have any questions that this document does not answer, you should ask your surgeon or any member of the healthcare team.

• **What is an epidermoid cyst?**

An epidermoid cyst is a lump in the skin where a cyst fills with a waxy whitish substance. It usually has a central pore which opens onto the skin.

• **What is a lipoma?**

A lipoma is simply a lump of fatty tissue in the layer of fat underneath the skin. The skin over it is completely normal and is not attached to the lipoma underneath. A lipoma can vary in size and some may grow to over ten centimetres (four inches). There is often only one of them but some people have several at the same time.

• **What is a skin tag?**

A skin tag is a small lump hanging from the skin.

• **What is a mole?**

A mole is a coloured lesion, which may be

present at birth or develop later in life. Moles that change suddenly may be turning malignant (cancerous) and your doctor may recommend that your mole is removed to make sure it does not change into a cancer.

**Are there any alternatives to surgery?**

Surgery is the only reliable way to remove skin lesions but you may simply leave them alone.

**What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?**

Epidermoid cysts can be left alone and often cause no problems at all. Some may grow in size. Occasionally the contents of epidermoid cysts leak out or they can become infected, needing antibiotics or surgery.

Lipomata tend to grow in size if they are left alone. As they get larger they appear more obvious and can interfere with clothing. Occasionally lipomata on the inside of the upper arm or thigh may rub during movement and cause irritation or pain.

**What does the operation involve?**

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for. You can help by confirming to your surgeon and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

Removing a skin lesion is usually performed under local anaesthetic and usually takes between fifteen and twenty five minutes. Your surgeon will only begin the operation when both of you are satisfied that the local anaesthetic is working.

When removing an epidermoid cyst, your surgeon will try to remove it whole as this

makes sure that none of the cyst wall is left behind and prevents it from returning. Your surgeon will make an elliptical cut over the cyst and will then cut out the cyst (see figure 1).

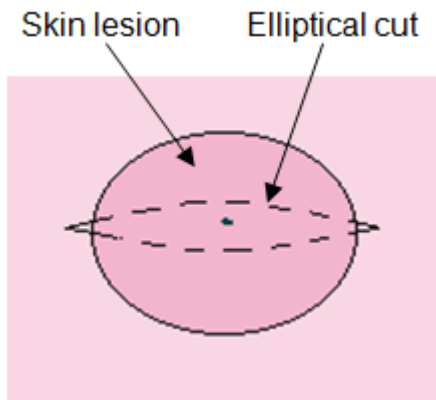


Figure 1  
Epidermoid cyst and typical cut made to remove it

Your surgeon may be able to safely remove the cyst using a smaller cut. They will close the cut with stitches. The cut usually heals to leave a small straight scar.

The stitches may be dissolvable. If not, they are usually left for five to seven days, but this will depend on your operation. They can be removed at your GP's surgery after this time. To remove a lipoma, your surgeon will make a straight cut in the skin directly over it. The lipoma is freed up from the tissues around it and removed. They will then close the cut with stitches which can be removed at your GP's surgery in about five days, depending on your operation.

A skin tag can simply be numbed with local anaesthetic and then removed. You will often not need a stitch.

When removing a mole, your surgeon will cut all the way around it using an elliptical cut. They will close the cut with stitches. The cut usually heals to leave a small straight scar.

### What should I do about my medication?

You should make sure your surgeon knows the medication you are on and follow their

advice.

You may need to stop taking warfarin or clopidogrel before your operation.

If you are a diabetic, it is important that your diabetes is controlled around the time of your operation. Follow your surgeon's advice about when to take your medication. If you are on beta-blockers to control your blood pressure, you should continue to take your medication as normal.

### What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make your operation as safe as possible. However, complications can happen. Some of these can be serious. You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

#### 1 Complications of anaesthesia

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

#### 2 General complications of any operation

- **Pain**, which happens with every operation. The local anaesthetic will start to wear off after a couple of hours. After this time you may feel some pain. You may need simple painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen.

- **Bleeding** during or after surgery. This is usually little but may cause bruising or temporary swelling under the skin.

- **Infection of the surgical site** (wound).

This is unusual. To reduce the risk of infection it is important to keep warm around the time of your operation. Let a member of the healthcare team know if you feel cold. In the week before your operation, you should not shave the area where a cut is likely to be made. Try to have a bath or shower either the day before or on the day of your

operation. After your operation, you should let your surgeon know if you get a temperature, notice pus in your wound, or if your wound becomes red, sore or painful. An infection usually settles with antibiotics but you may occasionally need another operation.

- **Unsightly scarring** of the skin.
- **Wound breakdown**, if the skin fails to heal. This is usually treated with dressings that allow the wound to heal without needing more stitches.

Skin lesion Elliptical cut

Figure 1

Epidermoid cyst and typical cut made to remove it

### 3 Specific complications of this operation

- **A lipoma or an epidermoid cyst** can come back, which may need a further operation.
- **A larger operation may be needed.** If a lesion was removed and was found to be a cancer, an operation will be needed to make sure it is completely removed.

#### How soon will I recover?

- **In hospital**

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area. After a short while you will be able to go home. A responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. You should be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact a member of the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

- **Returning to normal activities**

You should not drive, operate machinery (this includes cooking) or do any potentially dangerous activities for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination. If you had sedation, you should also not sign legal

documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

You should be able to return to work the following day unless your work will put a strain on the stitches. It is unusual for these procedures to restrict any daily activities you carry out.

- **Lifestyle changes**

If you smoke, try to stop smoking now.

Stopping smoking will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher chance of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

#### Summary

Skin lesions are common and can be treated by surgery.

Surgery is usually safe and effective.

However, complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you make an informed decision about surgery.

Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

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