

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 is an abscess?

An abscess is a collection of pus surrounded by a wall of tissue. It causes a painful lump and can make you feel unwell.

Your surgeon has recommended an incision (cut) and drainage operation to remove the pus. However, 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.

How does an abscess happen?

An abscess happens when the body tries to control infection by forming a wall around an infected area. Pus forms within this wall. As the amount of pus increases, the lump grows and causes pain. You can get an abscess anywhere in the body.

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should no longer have the abscess. Surgery should prevent you from having serious complications that an abscess can cause.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Surgery is recommended as it is the only dependable way to remove the pus and cure the condition. If an abscess is small antibiotics may work but will not be effective in most cases. Sometimes draining the pus with a needle can help but the pus may come back.

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

An abscess will get bigger and more painful with time. Eventually it will burst through the

weakest point of its wall (usually the skin) and the pus will drain out. However, this takes time and the abscess will cause a lot of pain before this happens.

When an abscess bursts on its own, it does so through a small opening. As a result, the opening may heal over before all the pus has drained out. Because of this, the infection may stay and the abscess may come back.

If the abscess is not treated, the infection may get into the bloodstream and cause septicaemia. This can be serious and can even cause death if not treated quickly.

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.

A variety of anaesthetic techniques are possible. A small abscess can be drained under a local anaesthetic but most need a general anaesthetic. Your anaesthetist will discuss this with you. You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection. The operation usually takes between ten and twenty minutes. Your surgeon will make a cut in your skin over the abscess. This allows the pus to drain out.

Your surgeon will take a swab to identify the cause of the infection.

Your surgeon will make sure all the pus is removed from the cavity and that there are no connections with other cavities or organs. They will then wash the cavity out

with an antiseptic solution.

Once the pus has been removed, the cavity needs to heal upwards from its floor so the opening in the skin is left open.

If the cavity is deep, your surgeon will place an antiseptic dressing in it to keep it open, allowing pus to drain out and the wound to heal properly. The dressing may need to be changed regularly until the wound has completely healed.

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 and can even cause death. 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 pain from the operation should be much less severe than the pain from the abscess. The healthcare team will try to reduce your pain. They will give you medication to control the pain and it is important that you take it as you are told so you can move about and cough freely.

- **Bleeding** during or after surgery, but this is usually little.

- **Unsightly scarring** of the skin.

- **Blood clots** in the legs (deep-vein thrombosis), which can occasionally move through the bloodstream to the lungs (pulmonary embolus), making it difficult for you to breathe. The healthcare team will assess your risk. Nurses will encourage you

to get out of bed soon after surgery and may give you injections, medication or special stockings to wear.

3 Specific complications of this operation

- **The abscess keeps coming back**, if the skin heals over too early. An abscess may also form again if there is a problem that causes infection to come back. This may not be obvious at your first operation.

How soon will I recover?

• In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward. You should be able to go home the same day or the day after. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay until after your first dressing is changed or longer if the abscess was large. If you do go home the same day, 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 a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

Your doctor will tell you when you can return to work depending on the extent of surgery and your type of work. You should be able to return to work as soon as you can move about and sit freely.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check with your doctor and insurance company first.

- **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.

- **The future**

Most people make a full recovery and can return to normal activities. In a small number of cases the abscess can come back, which may need further investigation and an operation.

Summary

An abscess is a collection of pus that can make you feel unwell. Surgery should prevent you from having serious complications that an abscess can cause.

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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