



REMOVING BENIGN SKIN LESIONS

WHAT ARE BENIGN SKIN LESIONS?

Benign skin lesions are found on or just below the skin. Examples of benign skin lesions are sebaceous cysts, lipomata (plural of lipoma), skin tags and moles. These are not life-threatening but your surgeon can remove your skin lesion if you want. A benign skin lesion can almost always be removed under local anaesthetic. The information about local anaesthetic is at the end of this document.

The decision is yours as to whether to proceed with an operation or not. This document will give you enough information about the risks and benefits so you can make an informed decision.

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

➤ **What is a sebaceous cyst?**

A sebaceous cyst is a lump in the skin caused by a blocked hair follicle. This 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 centimeters (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 off 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 way to remove skin lesions reliably but you may simply leave them alone.

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

Sebaceous cysts can be left alone and often cause no problems at all. Some may grow in size. Occasionally the contents of sebaceous cysts leak out of them 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 clothes straps. Occasionally lipomata on the inside of the upper arm or thigh may rub during movement and cause irritation and pain.

What does the operation involve?

Your surgeon will only begin the operation when both of you are satisfied that the local anaesthetic is working.

When removing a sebaceous 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. The surgeon will make an elliptical cut over your cyst and will then cut out the cyst. The cut will be closed with stitches to leave a small straight scar. The stitches are usually left for five to seven days.

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. The cut in the skin is then closed with stitches.

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

When removing a mole, the surgeon will cut all the way around it using an elliptical cut. The cut will be closed with stitches and usually heals to a small straight scar.

What risks or complications can occur?

We try to make sure your operation is safe. Most operations are successful with few complications. However, every procedure has risks and potential complications. Those most relevant to this operation are listed below. Please discuss them with your doctor if there is anything you do not understand.

The risks and complications fall into three categories.

1. Complications of anaesthesia
2. General complications of any operation
3. Specific complications of this operation

1. Complications of anaesthesia

Please read the information about local anaesthetic given at the end of this document.

2. General complications of any operation

- **Pain**, which occurs 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 painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen and you can get these from your local pharmacy.

- **Bleeding**, this can occur either during or after surgery. This is usually very little but may cause bruising or temporary swelling under the skin.
- **Infection** in the surgical wound, which may need treatment with antibiotics. This is unusual.
- **Unsightly scarring of the skin**

3. Specific complications of this operation

- **A lipoma or a sebaceous cyst** can come back, which may need a further operation.
- **A larger operation may be needed.** If a mole 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 room. After a short while you will be allowed to go home.

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

➤ Return to normal activities

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

Summary

Benign skin lesions are common and can be treated by surgery. Surgery is very safe and effective. However, risks and complications can occur. You need to know about them to help you make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help with early detection and treatment.

LOCAL ANAESTHETIC

What is local anaesthetic?

A local anaesthetic is a drug that is injected into the tissues to make them numb.

A local anaesthetic has been recommended for your operation. However, the decision is yours as to whether to have a local anaesthetic or not. This document will give you enough information about the risks and benefits so you can make an informed decision.

If you have any questions that are not answered by this document, you should ask your anaesthetist or any member of the healthcare team.

How does a local anaesthetic work?

Local anaesthetics temporarily stop nerves working so that you do not feel pain. The simplest form of local anaesthesia is to inject the drug just around the area where the operation is going to take place. This tends to sting or burn for a few seconds and then the area goes numb. The feeling of pain goes away much sooner than the feeling of touch, so do not be alarmed if you can still feel pressure or movement.

The procedure will not start until you and the doctor are both satisfied that the area is numb to pain.

Although the starting area is numb, the operation may reach areas that have not been numbed. If this happens, your doctor will give you some more local anaesthetic until those areas are numb to pain.

Local anaesthetics generally work for a few hours depending on the type of drug and dose used. After this time the area should go back to normal.

Are there any alternatives to a local anaesthetic?

If you are concerned about being awake during the operation, it may be possible for it to be performed under a general anaesthetic. However, there are risks associated with a general anaesthetic. Other anaesthetic procedure may be possible such as an epidural or regional block, although these use local anaesthetic drugs.

What risks or complications can occur?

Serious problems with local anaesthetics are very rare indeed. The following are the main potential problems.

- **Not enough pain relief**, which is usually corrected by giving more local anaesthetic. Occasionally, other forms of drugs or anaesthetic have to be given as well. Always let your doctor know if you are in pain.
- **Allergy** to local anaesthetics. This is extremely rare. Many people have been told, or think, they are allergic to local anaesthetic given at the dentist. This is rarely the case, but you must tell the person giving your local anaesthetic about any problems you have had in the past.
- **Bleeding**, which can occur if the needle used to inject the local anaesthetic strikes a blood vessel. The usual result is a small bruise that will not cause problems.
- **Permanent nerve damage**. This is very rare indeed. Occasionally the local anaesthetic has a longer effect than expected (up to 48 hours) but this usually settles down on its own).
- **Absorption into the bloodstream**, which can occur if the local anaesthetic is accidentally injected into the bloodstream or if it is absorbed into the bloodstream more quickly than usual. This is very rare but can cause various problems temporarily affecting the heart and brain, which can be serious. The dose of local anaesthetic is always limited and care is taken to avoid injecting it into the bloodstream.

Please discuss these risks and potential complications with your anaesthetist if there is anything you do not understand.

SUMMARY

A local anaesthetic has been recommended as the best way to provide an effective anaesthetic for your operation. It is a very safe and effective way of numbing the area to be operated on and for providing pain relief afterwards. However, risks and complications can occur. You need to know about them to help you make an informed decision about your anaesthetic. Knowing about them will also help with early detection and treatment.

Paying for your operation

The costs of removing benign skin lesions are covered by most medical insurance policies. However, we strongly advise you to check with your insurer before you are admitted to hospital. If you are paying for your own treatment, the cost of the operation will be explained to you, and confirmed in writing, when you book the operation. Your consultant's secretary or the hospital can give you an estimate beforehand.