



Ear surgery post-operative information

(middle ear and mastoid)

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This leaflet explains more about your ear operation, including what to expect afterwards while you are recovering at home.



What happens during the surgery?

During the surgery you are looked after by the anaesthetic team. This involves having a tube placed through your mouth into your windpipe so a machine can breathe for you while you are asleep. Sometimes, due to the breathing tube, people have a **sore throat** for a couple of days afterwards.

For some operations we place tiny needles under the skin near your eyebrow and the corner of your mouth or top lip. These are connected to a machine, which enables us to monitor your facial nerve. These are removed at the end of the operation but occasionally afterwards people get some **bruising** in these areas. This may take a week or so to settle.

Will I feel any pain?

The ear will usually be **sore** for 7-14 days afterwards and we encourage you to take regular simple painkillers (paracetamol and ibuprofen) as necessary for that time.

What happens after the surgery?

After your operation you might go home on the same day or stay one night in hospital. This will depend on how you are feeling and whether your surgery finishes later in the day, in which case it is more likely you will stay overnight.

The top part of your ear may be **numb** after the surgery. This will recover over approximately three months.

You may get some bruising that runs down your neck from behind the ear; this is more common in older patients and will settle over approximately 2-3 weeks.

When you wake up from the anaesthetic you may have a **bandage** on your head. This is to protect the operated ear for the first few hours or first night after the surgery. It usually comes off the following morning - either at home or before you are discharged home.

It is **very important** that you keep your ear dry afterwards. This reduces the likelihood of an infection. You **must not** wash your hair **for at least 10 days** but you can use dry shampoo. When you are bathing or showering you can protect the ear canal using cotton wool covered with Vaseline, this helps to repel water. A shower cap is also sensible.



The incision

If there is an incision it may have some white sticky dressings over it. These should remain on for 7-10 days. They can then be peeled off and if the wound has healed you can wash carefully behind the ear. Do not worry if the sticky dressings come off sooner. **You should wait 5-10 days before you clean/wash the incision.**

Often the stitches I use will be absorbable and not seen as they are beneath the skin. Sometimes I use blue stitches that will need to be removed by the nurse at your GP surgery 8-10 days after the operation. If this is the case then appropriate instructions will be on your discharge letter.

The ear canal

There will be dressings that fill the ear canal to protect your ear while it heals. Due to the dressings it will feel blocked - I will remove these when you return to clinic.

There may be some **bloody discharge from your ear** for the first few days. You can change the outer cotton wool as required; this may initially be 3-4 times a day but will steadily reduce.

If there is infection or inflammation found during the surgery we may prescribe some oral antibiotics for 5-7 days afterwards. Take these as prescribed.

Possible symptoms

For many surgeries I have to lift up the ear drum and therefore operate near to/around the **taste** nerve. When there is disease and occasionally for access, the taste nerve will sometimes be bruised or damaged. This can result in a metallic taste in the mouth affecting the tongue on the side of the surgery. Usually this steadily resolves over 6-12 weeks.

After the surgery you may find your **balance** is affected for a short while. Sometimes people get very dizzy immediately after and feel sick. This can partly be a reaction to the anaesthetic drugs but also due to disturbance of the inner ear. It usually settles within the first few days. I encourage you to have 1-2 weeks off work and rest a lot for the first few days. You will steadily feel better and be able to do a little bit more each day as you recover. Do not over do it.

If you have **tinnitus** (a condition where you hear ringing or roaring sounds in the ear) it may get worse immediately after the operation. Even if you have not had tinnitus before, it can occur after the surgery. This is due to disturbance of the inner ear and/or blockage of the middle/outer ear. This tends to settle as the ear heals.



What to expect and what to avoid

- As the ear heals you are likely to get some popping and crackling sounds in the ear
- Avoid straining and heavy lifting
- **Do not** stifle your sneezes
- Be very gentle if you blow your nose
- You may get a pulsing sensation
- **Do not** arrange air travel for 4-6 weeks after surgery (check with me)
- Depending on which operation you've had - avoid scuba diving or air travel with a cold (if possible)
- **Do not** drive if you feel dizzy or off-balance.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Your post-operative clinic appointment will be 1-6 weeks after the surgery depending on how long I advise the ear canal dressing to remain in place. Sometimes I use absorbable ear canal dressings and will ask you to put in some ear drops before returning to the clinic.

If any complications arise while you are recovering please call my secretary and we will arrange an urgent review.

If you get worsening imbalance or dizziness, very loud tinnitus or severe pain when things have previously been steadily improving please contact us immediately.

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