What am I waiting for?
Information for patients
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The Surgical Emergency Unit (SEU) treats people with conditions that may require surgery as an emergency. An emergency means that you need to be seen and assessed as soon as possible, instead of having an out-patient appointment at a later date.

We understand that you and your family may be worried about what is wrong and want to know how quickly you will be assessed.

As part of your assessment you will have different investigations to give the doctors more information about your condition and help them plan how best to treat you. Usually these investigations include:

- blood tests
- X-rays
- ultrasound scans
- CT (computerised tomography) scans.

The results of these investigations may show that you need to stay in hospital and possibly have an operation to treat your condition.

We will ask you not to have anything to eat and drink (often called “nil by mouth”) whilst we assess you. This includes not sucking sweets or chewing gum. The reason for this is because eating or drinking may affect your scan result or delay any surgery you might need. Whilst you are “nil by mouth” you may still be allowed to swill your mouth with water to prevent dryness and discomfort, but you must not swallow this liquid.

During the assessment process you may be placed on intravenous (IV) fluids. These will help to stop you from becoming dehydrated. The fluids are given to you through a thin plastic tube in your vein called a cannula; more commonly known as a drip.

If you have any concerns or are unsure if you are allowed to eat and drink, please ask the nurse or doctor looking after you.
Ultrasound scans

Ultrasound scans are routinely performed between 8am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday.

If your condition means you need a scan outside of these hours your doctor will request one.

All ultrasound scans are prioritised according to how unwell you are and how busy the department is.

We aim to perform your ultrasound scan within 24 hours of it being requested; however sometimes this is not possible if the department has lots of urgent requests from other areas of the hospital.

If you are well enough we may arrange for you to go home to rest and return to the hospital the next day.

For more information on what happens during an ultrasound scan please ask for our leaflet ‘Having an ultrasound scan’.

X-rays and CT scans

X-rays are performed 24 hours a day, and so you may be collected for your X-ray at any time.

Around 200 X-rays are performed by the radiology department every day. The department is responsible for performing X-rays and CT scans for the entire Oxford University Hospitals Trust.

CT scans are routinely performed between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday, but if your condition means you need to have a CT scan outside of these hours, your doctor will request one.

All X-rays and CT scans are prioritised according to your needs and those of other patients.

For more information on what happens during a CT scan please ask for our leaflet ‘Information for patients having a CT scan’.
The emergency list for surgery

If you need to have an operation you will be booked onto the emergency list. Currently, the John Radcliffe Hospital has one emergency theatre which is staffed 24hrs a day. It is used to operate on patients who need surgery as an emergency, including patients from other areas of the hospital.

We aim to operate on you as quickly as possible. When the doctor books you on the emergency list for surgery you will be prioritised according to how unwell you are. We will continually assess you and if your condition worsens, your priority will change.

We cannot always tell you when you will have your operation because the emergency list can change at any time if other emergencies are admitted to the hospital. Usually by late evening we may be able to tell you if your operation will go ahead that day or overnight.

If your operation has been delayed, you will be put on the list for the next day and, if your condition allows, you will be given something to eat and drink.

*If you feel concerned about your wait or you don’t understand what you are waiting for, please speak to a member of staff.*

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk

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