

Department of Dermatology

Guide to Mohs' Micrographic Surgery

Information for patients



What is Mohs' micrographic surgery?

Mohs' micrographic surgery is a highly effective form of treatment for skin cancers and offers the best chance of cure whilst only taking the smallest amount of tissue necessary. The treatment allows the tumour to be removed completely bit by bit in one visit to the hospital, minimising the amount of normal skin removed and reducing scarring.

Each time a piece of tissue is removed, it is checked for the presence of cancer. The procedure may need to be repeated two or three times to ensure that the cancer is completely removed. Unfortunately this means a bit of waiting around for the specimens to be processed. Patients may need multiple attempts to clear the tumour and so it can be quite a long day although the majority of patients are clear within one or two attempts.

Micrographic surgery is carried out under local anaesthetic, and any pain can be controlled between stages.

When is micrographic surgery used?

Micrographic surgery is used on basal cell carcinomas that are:

- difficult to see
- that have recurred after previous treatment
- are in important areas such as the lip, nose or eye where it is particularly important to remove as little skin as possible.

What are the risks of micrographic surgery?

The risks for this type of surgery are the same for any procedure. You may get a little bleeding from the wound and infection can occasionally happen. Nerves sometimes are involved with the tumour and so rarely you may get numbness around the scar or the muscles may not move in the same way. The wound will need to be repaired and so you will have a scar although every effort is made to place this sensitively. Finally the tumour may recur in the same site but this is extremely unusual.

Preparing for your day case admission

You have now been given a date for micrographic surgery. Please be aware that your surgery could **potentially take the whole day**.

You will be offered sandwiches, but if you have any **special dietary requirements** please bring your own food. Coffee and tea is available.

For reasons of infection control and health and safety, relatives or friends will not be permitted in the recovery area, but may wait in the main waiting area.

Please make **arrangements for someone** to collect you at the end of your procedure. It is not advisable to use public transport or to drive yourself.

Please wear light, loose and easily removable **clothes**.

After surgery you will sit in a **mixed sex** recovery area; if this causes you a concern, please let us know before your date of surgery.

What will happen on the day?

Please report to the reception desk in the Dermatology Outpatient Department at the Churchill Hospital, Oxford at the time stated on your letter. A nurse will escort you to the theatre, where you will be given a hospital gown to wear.

The lesion may be photographed before local anaesthetic is injected to numb the area. You will be fully awake throughout the procedure.

The surgeon will remove the tissue and send it to our laboratory; this is called the First Stage. A temporary dressing will be applied to the wound and you will be taken to the recovery area.

The processing in the laboratory can take up to two hours or longer. If cancer cells are found you will be escorted back to theatre for further surgery (Second Stage). The second specimen is then sent to the laboratory for checking.

There are occasions when further stages may have need to be taken until the surgeon is satisfied that there are no cancer cells remaining.

When the area of tissue is clear of cancer cells, the surgeon will discuss closing the wound. This may involve a small graft, or skin flap. A dressing will be applied.

If you are having surgery close to your eye or occasionally if your wound is large you may need to go to the West Wing at the John Radcliffe Hospital to have it repaired. This will usually have been arranged in advance.

What happens after the surgery?

Stitches

If you have stitches in your wound we may ask you to come back the following week for them to be removed or you may have them removed at your GP's surgery.

If a change of dressing is required then either the Practice Nurse or District Nurse at your local GP surgery could do this for you.

Will the area be painful afterwards?

- After the local anaesthetic has worn off (approximately 2-3 hours), the area will be painful and we advise you to take regular Paracetamol for the next couple of days.
- You may experience some bruising and swelling; this should settle down within a few days, but may last longer.
- The surgeon may prescribe a course of antibiotics for you to take after the operation.

Going home

Usually patients are ready to go home during the afternoon or sometimes earlier. Very occasionally you may have to stay in overnight in the hospital (this would normally be arranged previously with the doctor).

When you go home you will have a bulky dressing covering your wound; this is essential for pressure to stop any bleeding. It is important to leave this on. If you experience bleeding from the wound, apply direct firm pressure to the wound for 20 minutes. This should stop the bleeding. Contact the Dermatology Department if this does not help.

Things to be aware of

- You may eat and drink normally before and after your operation, unless told otherwise.
- If on Warfarin, please get a blood test check five working days before surgery.
- If you are on aspirin and your surgery is near the eye, you may be asked to stop for 2 weeks.
- It is advisable to avoid alcohol for 24 hours after surgery.
- Take all other regular medications as normal.
- Please feel free to bring something to do as there is a lot of waiting.
- You may need to arrange time off work after the procedure. This will depend on the complexity of surgery and the type of work you do. Please discuss this with the doctor on the day.

How to contact us

If you would like to know any more or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the Dermatology nurses on **01865 228241**.

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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