

Patient Information

After Ear Surgery

Including Mastoidectomy, Tympanoplasty, Stapedectomy and Myringoplasty

Ear, Nose & Throat

Introduction

Caring for Yourself After Your Operation

It is normal to experience some discomfort after ear surgery. The following advice will help your recovery and reduce the risk of complications.

Immediately After Surgery

- You may feel dizzy or unsteady for the first few hours or days after your operation. Take care when getting out of bed and ask someone to help you if needed.
- You may have cotton wool or a dressing in your ear. You can replace the outer cotton wool if it becomes soiled, but do not remove any packing or dressings that have been placed inside your ear unless your surgeon or nurse has advised you to do so.

Keeping Your Ear Dry

Keeping your ear dry is important while it heals.

- It is normal for your ear to leak a small amount of blood-stained or watery fluid for a few days after surgery.
- Do not swim or put your head under water until your surgeon tells you it is safe to do so.
- When showering or washing your hair, place a piece of cotton wool coated with petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline®) in the outer ear to help prevent water entering the ear. Remove it as soon as you have finished.
- If you have a wound behind your ear, this can usually get wet 48 hours after surgery, unless you have been advised otherwise.
- Continue to protect your ear from water until it has fully healed.

Activity

- Rest for the first few days and gradually increase your activity as you feel able.

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- Avoid heavy lifting, strenuous exercise and contact sports for at least two weeks, or until your surgeon advises it is safe.
- Most people can return to work when they feel well enough. Your surgeon will advise you if you need longer off work, depending on the type of surgery you have had.
- Do not fly until your surgeon tells you it is safe. Air travel can affect the pressure inside your ear and may interfere with healing.

Pain and Other Common Symptoms

- It is normal to have some pain, tenderness or swelling around your ear or the side of your head. Take your pain relief medication as prescribed.
- Do not blow your nose forcefully for at least 2–3 weeks, or until your surgeon advises. If you need to blow your nose, do so gently, one nostril at a time.
- If you need to sneeze, keep your mouth open to reduce pressure inside your ear.

While your ear is healing, it is common to experience:

- A feeling of fullness or pressure in the ear.
- Crackling, popping or clicking sounds.
- Reduced hearing, particularly while ear packing is in place. Your hearing may seem worse before it starts to improve. This is expected and usually improves once the packing has been removed and your ear has healed.
- Ringing or buzzing in the ear (tinnitus). This may be more noticeable for a short time after surgery and usually settles as your ear recovers.
- Mild dizziness or balance problems for a few days.
- A metallic or unusual taste in your mouth. This happens because a small nerve involved with taste runs close to the eardrum and may become temporarily irritated during surgery. In most cases, this improves over the following weeks or months.

Ongoing Care

- Follow any instructions you have been given about ear drops or other medications.
- Avoid inserting cotton buds or any other objects into your ear.
- Attend all of your follow-up appointments so your surgeon can check that your ear is healing well and remove any packing if required.
- Continue to keep your ear dry until your surgeon confirms it has healed.

When to Seek Medical Advice

Please contact your GP, NHS 111, or attend your nearest Accident & Emergency (A&E) Department if you experience:

- A high temperature (fever) or signs of infection, such as increasing pain, swelling, redness, warmth, or discharge with an unpleasant smell.
- Heavy bleeding from the ear or bleeding that does not stop.
- Increasing dizziness that does not improve or makes it difficult to stand or walk.
- A sudden worsening of your hearing after it had started to improve.
- Weakness or drooping of the muscles on one side of your face.
- A severe headache, neck stiffness or persistent vomiting.

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Advice After a General Anaesthetic

A general anaesthetic can affect your memory, concentration and reaction times for up to 24–48 hours after your operation.

If you are discharged home on the day of your surgery, a responsible adult should stay with you for at least the first 24 hours.

For the first 24–48 hours, you should avoid:

- Driving.
- Drinking alcohol.
- Smoking.
- Operating machinery or using potentially dangerous equipment, including kitchen appliances.
- Signing important or legal documents.

If You Have Any Questions

If you have any concerns after your surgery, please contact the Alexandra Day Surgery Unit on: 01279 973484 or 01279 973482

If you need information about your follow-up appointment, please contact the Appointments Team on: 01279 82 7391

If you would like this leaflet in another language or format, or you would like to give feedback on your care, please contact our patient experience team on paht.pals@nhs.net