

BENIGN SKIN CONDITIONS

PATIENT INFORMATION GUIDE

A large part of many plastic surgeons' work involves removing small, benign skin blemishes.

Introduction

From moles and warts to cysts and fatty lumps under the skin (known as 'lipomas'), usually only a small operation under local anaesthetic is needed.

What does this condition involve?

Benign skin conditions, often referred to as 'lumps and bumps', encompass a range of benign growths. These include:

- Moles
- Warts
- Cysts
- Lipomas
- Other Lesions

What surgery is available, and what techniques are involved?

A benign skin growth is removed by a simple surgical excision carried out under local anaesthetic. The local anaesthetic gets to work very quickly and the anaesthetised area will remain numb for several hours.

After the growth has been excised, the wound may be stitched, with some techniques no stitches are needed. If the operation is on your face or hands, you may require stitches that will need to be removed within seven days. Elsewhere on the body, dissolvable stitches will often be used. Simple dressings may or may not be applied to the wound. You will be given advice about how to care for the wound when you leave the hospital. You will soon be able to wash normally after the operation.

Is this surgery available on the NHS?

Yes. Minor skin surgery for the treatment of benign skin conditions is usually available on the NHS. However, in some areas of the country the local Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) have introduced restrictions on what is available. Your GP will be able to advise you about this.

Who will I see as patient?

Your general practitioner will refer you to hospital to examine the blemish and advise you how best to deal with it. You will see a plastic surgeon for this advice. If it is decided that an operation is necessary it can sometimes be done at the same visit, however, sometimes a second visit will be needed.

What should I expect in terms of treatment, procedures and outcomes?

Operations for the treatment of benign skin conditions often take around 30 minutes to perform. The surgical procedure involved is simple and straightforward, and there are generally very few complications experienced by the patient.

As the local anaesthetic wears off, the area that has been operated on may feel a little bit sore, but the pain is rarely severe and can usually be taken care of with a couple of paracetamol. However, patients undergoing these operations should arrange for someone to pick them up and drive them home, and should not operate any machinery for at least six hours. If you have received an operation on the face you should sit quietly and avoid bending down, while patients who have been treated on the leg or hand should keep the affected limb elevated as much as possible. In the days after the operation you may experience some tenderness, swelling and bruising in the affected area, but this will settle within about a week. Most patients heal up very well. However, as with any operation there is a slight risk of problems with wound healing such as bleeding, infection or separation of the wound. These problems are usually minor in nature and can generally be dealt with by the hospital or local surgery.

Patients should also be aware that all tissues removed from the body will be sent off for testing. This is to check that the original benign diagnosis was correct. All patients will be contacted once the tests have been carried out. Of course, if anything more serious is detected, you will be seen again to discuss this. More information on malignant skin conditions can be found on our skin cancer page.

Links and further information

The British Association of Skin Camouflage