

Post-Operative Instructions Cholesteatoma Surgery

Care of the ear after surgery

a) Keyhole (Endoscopic) Approach:

All surgery was performed through your ear canal. There may have been a small incision to harvest the graft material to repair your eardrum. This is usually taken from the tragus, the bump in front of the ear canal. There will be dissolving sutures that do not need removal.

The ear canal will have packing within it, which is usually dissolvable. The outer ear will have a cotton ball which usually remains in place without the need for any tape.

Every day you should remove the cotton ball, and then instil a few antibiotic ear drops into the ear canal. This can go onto any packing seen inside the canal. Then place a fresh new cotton ball into the outer ear. Continue this for 1 week after your surgery.

b) Mastoidectomy:

When required, an incision may have been made behind your ear to access the mastoid (honeycomb bone behind the ear). This wound will also have dissolvable sutures that do not need removal. You will have a head bandage overnight, which is removed the morning after surgery (usually by the surgical team if in hospital but can be unwrapped by yourself at home very easily if you were admitted for day surgery.) Underneath the head bandage are a couple of absorbent pads then the cotton ball as outlined above.

The wound behind the ear should be kept dry for 1 week. No hair washing. There will be steri-strips over the wound which can be left in situ until they start to peel up (usually week 2-3). They can stay in place even when you start washing your hair after 1 week.

Fatigue

The general anaesthetic, surgery and medications may cause you to feel fatigued.

Pain

Generally, even with long operations on the ear, there is only minimal post-operative pain. Simple analgesia (painkillers) are generally all that is required but the anaesthetist will ensure that you have stronger painkillers if needed.

Showering

Keyhole (Endoscopic) Approach: Can wash hair from **day 1**

Mastoidectomy: Wait **1 week** before hair washing (to protect the wound behind the ear)

Protecting the ear canal during showering:

When you do start showering (as per above rules), **NO WATER** should enter the ear canal until the ear canal and eardrum are totally healed. This can be as short as a few weeks with the keyhole approach but may be up to 6 weeks. Therefore, keep the inside of the ear dry until your surgeon tells you it is ok to get it wet.

To keep the inside of the ear dry, replace the dry cotton ball with one that has been smeared all over with Vaseline. (Vaseline entry into the canal will not cause any problems at all). After your shower, you can throw away the Vaseline cotton ball and replace with a fresh dry one.

Do not use earplugs or re-useable plugs due to the risk of infection. A one-off cotton ball with Vaseline is preferred. Otherwise keep the ear as dry as possible. No swimming for 6 weeks (at least) after surgery.

Exercise

Avoid strenuous exercise, golf, weights, gym, etc. for 2 weeks after surgery to avoid any bleeding. There must be no water sports or submerging of the head, eg swimming, surfing until the ear is completely healed (usually 6 weeks).

Flying

It is best not to arrange any flights for at least 6 weeks after your surgery. Discuss this with your surgeon if there is an urgent or essential flight required. The reason is that flights involve pressure changes that could jeopardise your eardrum reconstruction.

Fluids and oral intake

It is important to stay well hydrated in the post-operative period. A normal diet can be consumed.

Bleeding

In the event of significant bleeding (generally anything over a teaspoon or continuous oozing) please seek urgent medical assistance, either by contacting the rooms or attending the nearest hospital with an emergency department. This is a very rare occurrence.

Slight blood staining on the cotton ball is common and not of concern. For minor bleeding of this nature, simply replace with a fresh cotton ball as necessary. Let the surgeon know if this does not settle down.

Post Operative Timetable:

3 weeks First post op review. Packing will be removed from ear canal. There will still not be any significant hearing change as the new eardrum will still be healing and there will be additional dissolvable packing material in the middle ear, plus blood, fluid etc all of which will impede normal hearing.

6 weeks Second post op review. Usually the skin has now completely healed and you may be permitted to resume water activities, but check with your surgeon. Some hearing may start to be appreciated, but it should still improve with further healing.

10 weeks Post operative audiogram. Further follow up will have been organised based on how the ear is healing in between weeks 6-10.