

Cryosurgery or cryotherapy

The Eye Unit Patient Information

This leaflet aims to inform patients who are considering cryosurgery and can help by answering some common questions.

What is cryosurgery?

Cryosurgery uses a special probe to apply very low temperatures to the eyelids in order to treat some skin lesions or misdirected lashes - trichiasis. There is no skin wound and scarring is uncommon.

Cryosurgery for trichiasis?

Cryosurgery can effectively treat a wide area of eyelid and may therefore be recommended if you have a large number of misdirected lashes. If only a few lashes are involved, then radiosurgery may be preferable as this does not also destroy your normal eyelashes - see separate leaflet.

Cryosurgery for skin lesions?

In carefully selected cases, cryosurgery can be an effective treatment for benign skin lesions and even for early skin cancers. This is particularly the case if surgery would be difficult or carry higher risks, as there is a higher chance that the lesions will come back again after cryosurgery.

What will happen during the procedure?

You **should not drive** to the hospital on the day of surgery. You will be asked to come to the hospital in good time so there may be a short wait. Following a numbing injection, a probe is applied to the area to freeze the eyelid for a specific time. A dressing is not normally required. The eyelid may be a little red and bruised from the anaesthetic injection. You may go home on the same day.

When can I drive and go to work after the operation?

You may start driving and working again as soon as the dressing is removed as long as your vision is clear and you are not light sensitive. Avoid heavy lifting or dirty and dusty environments to reduce the risk of complications.

Are there any risks?

This surgery is not essential for your health and the treatment being offered is optional. Cryotherapy causes a temporary reaction including swelling, redness and crusting. If you choose to have the treatment, other serious, significant or frequently occurring risks are as follows:

- **common (up to 1 in 20)** - pain or discomfort, loss of lashes, damage to eyelid glands, persistent lash growth, tingling, numbness - usually temporary
- **uncommon (up to 1 in 100)** - infection, scarring, lid notch, less or more skin pigment, dry or watery eye
- **rare (up to 1 in 1000)** - other e.g. lump
- **very rare (up to 1 in 10,000)** - hypertrophic or keloid scarring - only in susceptible individuals and very rarely seen on the eyelids
- **(1 in 100,000)** - reaction to anaesthetic, severe or permanent vision loss

What to expect after the operation

A dressing will be applied for 24 hours. Make sure the wound is kept clean and dry, if necessary clean it gently using cooled, boiled water and clean gauze or tissues.

You will be prescribed an eye ointment, which you should apply to the wound as directed, usually twice a day for seven days.

Because the surgical incision is located in the forehead, the scar is usually visible in some degree. This is especially significant the initial weeks/months after surgery. You may improve the scar appearance by massaging the area with antibiotic or lubricating ointment e.g. Vaseline.

You will experience some degree of swelling and bruising - cold compresses and elevation of the head will help to relieve any discomfort.

Bruising may take three or four weeks to disappear completely, although it can usually be concealed with make-up after seven days.

You can return to work when you wish but if you deal with the public, you may prefer to delay your return for around ten days because of bruising and swelling.

It is important to avoid strenuous activity for the first week after surgery.

Do not swim for four weeks because of the risk of infection.

Avoid heavy lifting, running or strenuous gym work-outs for four weeks or you may exacerbate bruising or swelling.

You cannot wear contact lenses for at least two weeks after surgery, because the eyelids may be stiff and sore and your eyes may be dry.

Some people experience blurred vision or sensitivity to light for a few days. A dry eye problem may be worsened by the surgery, and more frequent eye drops required.

When should I contact the department?

- you have any problems with your vision
- your eye becomes red or painful
- you cannot close your eye properly
- you have bleeding from the wound or a sticky discharge

Any problems or questions?

For further information and advice please contact:

Eye Emergency Helpline: 0300 019 4181

Mon-Sat: **8am-6pm** Sunday: **8:30am-2pm**. Bank Holidays: **8.30am-6pm**.

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