

University Health Service

Wedge resection operation for in-growing toe nails

This leaflet details some more information on the minor surgical procedure that your healthcare professional has recommended for the treatment of an in-growing toe nail. Please read it carefully before you sign your consent form so that you are fully informed about what the procedure involves.

What are in-growing toe nails?

In-growing toe nails are caused by fragments of nail that grow off of the normal nail at unwanted angles. Although the fragment often cannot be seen it can press into the skin surrounding the nail causing pain, discomfort on walking, possibly infection (with pus draining from the side of the nail & redness of the skin) and thickening of the skin surrounding the nail.

Most in-growing toe nails are the result of damage to the nail – sports injuries, something being dropped on to the nail or the likes. Poor or inappropriate cutting of the nail can worsen the problem, but is not usually the main cause.

What is the purpose of the operation?

A wedge resection aims to remove a wedge of nail from the effected side, thereby removing the offending offshoot fragment of nail that is causing the problem, and to prevent further re-growth to avoid the problem reforming.

How is the operation done?



Figure 1 shows a great toe that has an in-growing nail fragment on the left-side as viewed in the picture. The operation starts by numbing the toe, once it has been cleaned ready for surgery. This is done with two injections (figure 2) – one on either side of the base of the toe that numbs the toe beyond the injection sites.

Once numb, a pair of scissors designed especially for this task, are used to cut a line down the toe nail on the effected side (figure 3). It is necessary to cut into the nail bed beyond the cuticle to ensure the whole nail fragment can be removed. A pair of forceps is clamped on to the nail fragment and the 'wedge' of nail is removed (figure 4). If there any extra skin has formed as a reaction to the in-growing nail, this will be scaled off at this stage.

Finally, a cotton bud soaked in phenol is inserted into the nail bed at the base of the nail (figure 5) in order to damage the nail bed and stop the nail re-growing in a fashion that will allow the in-growing fragment to reform. The toe is now dressed with a bandage.

Risks

No surgery, no matter how small, is risk free and these are some of the problems you should be aware:

- *Failure* – it may not be possible to remove the wedge as planned, additional procedures might be needed, or the nail may re-grow at a later stage requiring a repeat of the wedge resection
- *Infection* – despite taking care to clean your toe and using sterile instruments, infection can occur in any surgical wound and you must see us if you think your toe has become infected
- *Bleeding* – any surgery site can bleed and whilst we take care to minimise any bleeding, if it is unexpectedly severe we may need to give you perform extra procedures, give additional medicines or even transfer you to hospital
- *Pain* – care is taken to anaesthetise your toe, but very infrequently it can be difficult to obtain complete numbing of the toe. You must decide whether to continue or abandon the procedure if this occurs. Some discomfort after the surgery is normal, but can usually be managed with ordinary painkillers
- *Anaphylaxis* – rarely people can be strongly allergic to an ingredient used in the cleaning agents, local anaesthetic, sutures or other products used during the procedure. Please tell us before the operation if you have any allergies. Again, we would act appropriately to counteract this, should it occur.

What should I do after the procedure?

Please aim to keep your dressing dry until you see the nurse, so that the wound may start to heal effectively. You will need to see the nurse 2 or 3 days after your operation to get the dressing changed.

Special precautions

Due to the nature of the operation, you will not be able to safely drive yourself home. We suggest you arrange a friend to come with you or think about whether you will need a taxi to get home afterwards. You may need to take a couple of days off of work, especially if your job involves manual work or if the toe is at risk of subsequent injury (e.g. on a building site).

Consent

We will ask you to sign a consent form before the procedure to say that you wish to proceed with the operation. Please read it carefully and ask about anything that you are unsure about.

More questions?

Please get in touch with one of our nurses or doctors to discuss any other questions you may have about your operation.