

Abscess Incision and Drainage

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is an abscess?

An abscess is a collection of pus surrounded by a wall of tissue. It causes a painful lump and can make you feel unwell.

An abscess happens when your body tries to control infection by forming a wall around an infected area. Pus forms within this wall. As the amount of pus increases, the lump grows and causes pain. You can get an abscess anywhere in your body.

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should no longer have the abscess and should be free of pain. Surgery should prevent the serious complications that an abscess can cause.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

If an abscess is small, antibiotics may work but will not be effective in most cases. Sometimes draining the pus with a needle can help but the pus may come back.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

An abscess will get larger and more painful with time. Eventually it will burst through the weakest point of its wall and the pus will drain out.

If the abscess is not treated, the infection may get into your bloodstream and cause septicaemia (blood poisoning).

An abscess



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What does the operation involve?

A small abscess can be drained under a local anaesthetic but most need a general anaesthetic. The operation usually takes 10 to 20 minutes.

Your surgeon will make a cut on your skin over the abscess. This allows the pus to drain out.

Once the pus has been removed, the cavity needs to heal upwards from the inside out, so the opening in your skin is left open.

If the cavity is deep, your surgeon will place a pack (antiseptic dressing) in it to keep it open, allowing pus to drain out and your wound to heal properly.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to reduce the risk of complications.

Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

Some complications can be serious and may even cause death.

General complications of any operation

- Bleeding during or after the operation.
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication.
- Blood clot in your leg (deep-vein thrombosis – DVT).
- Blood clot in your lung (pulmonary embolus), if a blood clot moves through your bloodstream to your lungs.
- Chest infection. Your risk will be lower if you have stopped smoking and you are free of Covid-19 (coronavirus) symptoms for at least 7 weeks before the operation.

Specific complications of this operation

- The abscess keeps coming back, if your skin heals over too early or if there is a problem that causes infection to come back.
- Slow healing, if your wound was packed.
- The problem coming back. You may need another procedure to fix it.

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain.
- Unsightly scarring of your skin.

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after.

Your doctor will tell you when you can return to work.

Most people make a full recovery and can return to normal activities.

Summary

An abscess is a collection of pus that can make you feel unwell. Surgery should prevent the serious complications that an abscess can cause.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

Reviewer

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Illustrator

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