

Adult squint surgery

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What is a squint?

A squint is the common name for 'strabismus', which is the medical term to describe eyes that are not pointing in the same direction. Squints are sometimes called 'lazy eye'. The squint may be present all or only some of the time. It may be in one eye only, in both eyes or may alternate between the two eyes.

Surgery is sometimes an option to improve the cosmetic appearance or to help alleviate symptoms such as double vision.

What is the aim of surgery?

- To improve the alignment of the eyes in order to make the squint smaller in size and less obvious
- In some patients, to reduce or try to eliminate double vision or to improve depth of (3D) vision
- Occasionally, to improve an abnormal position of the head

What does it involve?

There are six different muscles attached to the eyeball. Some of these are weakened or strengthened to make the eye straighter. These muscles are attached quite close to the front of the eye under the conjunctiva, the clear surface layer. The eye is never taken out of the socket during squint surgery.

Stitches are used to attach the muscles in their new positions. These stitches are usually soluble.

The operation is usually done on the squinting eye, but may be done on the other eye or both eyes. The amount of surgery depends on the angle of squint, which is measured before the operation.

The operation usually takes up to 60 minutes depending on the number of muscles that need surgery.

Squint surgery is done under a general anaesthetic. It is carried out in the Vanguard Eye Theatre Unit.

Before the day of surgery

Prior to surgery you will be required to have a nursing pre-operative assessment. This is to ensure you are fit to have surgery, to answer any questions you may have and provide information on the operation, and to plan for your discharge.

The assessment will involve a basic health check. The pre-op assessment nurse will:

- take a medical history including current medication and any allergies,
- check your blood pressure and urine,
- measure your weight and height.

Some patients may require a blood test and an ECG and a review by an anaesthetist prior to surgery. The nurse will also ensure that you have someone at home with you for 24 hours after the surgery.

You will also be seen by one of the orthoptists to ensure your squint measurements are stable. This can be up to 6 weeks prior to your surgery date and may be on a different day from your nursing pre-op assessment.

Adjustable sutures

Sometimes your surgeon will suggest doing the procedure with adjustable sutures.

Adjustable suture surgery is a type of eye muscle surgery that allows the surgeon to be able to fine-tune the eye muscle position immediately after the operation.

The final position of the muscles is adjusted once you have woken up from the anaesthetic, and are able to look at a target. One of the orthoptists will see you in the Vanguard Unit to measure the position of your eyes. If you wear glasses for distance or near vision, please bring these with you for this part of the operation.

How will I feel during the procedure?

Adjustment is done after drops of anaesthetic have been put into your eye to take away any pain. You may however feel a pressure or tugging sensation.

Special preparations

You should have nothing to eat from midnight the night before, but may have one small glass of either water or squash up to 6.30am on the morning of the operation.

How will I feel afterwards?

Your eyes will feel sore and you may have a pricking sensation.

There may be a blood stained discharge from the eye and the eye may look red and the eyelids swollen and your vision may be blurry. The discomfort tends to settle over the next four weeks but the redness can last for up to three months particularly with adjustable and repeat squint operations.

What happens after the procedure?

You should not drive for 48 hours after the general anaesthetic. We would advise that you may need one, or occasionally two, weeks off work. Work and normal activities can be resumed as soon as you feel comfortable to do so. It is quite safe to use your eyes for visual tasks such as reading and watching television.

Does the surgery cure the squint?

Overall, about 90% of patients find some improvement in their squint after surgery. The amount of correction that is right for one patient might be too much or too little for another with exactly the same size squint, so the squint might not be completely corrected by the operation. Although your eyes could be straight just after surgery, many patients require more than one operation in their lifetime. If the squint returns, it might 'drift' in either the same or opposite direction. We can't predict when that drift might occur.

Does the surgery cure the need for glasses or a lazy eye?

No, the operation does not aim to change the vision or the need for glasses.

What are the risks?

Squint surgery is generally a safe procedure. However, as with any operation, complications can and do occur. Generally, these are relatively minor but on rare occasions they could be serious.

Under- and over-correction

As the results of squint surgery are not completely predictable, the original squint might still be present (under-correction) or the squint direction could change (over-correction).

Occasionally, a different type of squint might occur. These problems could require another operation.

Double vision

You might experience double vision after surgery, as the brain adjusts to the new position of the eyes. This is normal and often settles in days or weeks.

Some might continue to experience double vision when they look to the side. Rarely, the double vision can be permanent in which case further treatment might be needed.

Allergy

Some patients might have a mild allergic reaction to the medication they have been prescribed after surgery. This results in itching/irritation and some redness and puffiness of the eyelids. It usually settles very quickly when the drops are stopped.

Stitches

You may develop an infection or abscess around the stitches. This is more likely to occur if you go swimming within the first four weeks after surgery.

A cyst can develop over the site of the stitches, which occasionally needs further surgery to remove it.

Redness

The redness can take as long as three months to go away. Occasionally, the eye does not completely return to its normal colour, particularly with repeated operations.

Scarring

Most of the scarring of the conjunctiva (skin of the eye) is not noticeable by three months, but occasionally visible scars will remain, especially with repeat operations. It is important to use any drops or ointment prescribed after the operation to reduce the chance of scarring.

Lost or slipped muscle

Rarely, one of the eye muscles might slip back from its new position during the operation or shortly afterwards. If this occurs, the eye is less able to move around and, if severe, further surgery can be required. Sometimes, it is not possible to correct this. The risk of slipped muscle requiring further surgery is about one in 1,000.

Needle penetration

If the stitches are too deep or the white of the eye is thin, a small hole in the eye can occur, which could require antibiotic treatment and possibly some laser treatment to seal the puncture site. Depending on the location of the hole, the sight could be affected. The risk of the needle passing too deeply is about one in 50.

Infection

Infection is a risk with any operation and, although rare, can result in loss of the eye or vision.

Loss of vision

Although very rare, loss of vision in the eye being operated can occur from this surgery.

Risk of serious damage to the eye or vision is approximately one in 30,000.

Anaesthetic risks

Anaesthetics are usually safe, but there are small and potentially serious risks.

Unpredictable reactions occur in around one in 20,000 cases and, unfortunately, death in around one in 100,000.

Remember: these complications are detailed for your information – the vast majority of people have no significant problems.

Aftercare

Pain relief

Any pain is usually relieved by taking paracetamol.

Eye drops

Eye drops will be prescribed to help keep the eye clean and to prevent infection. Before you go home, the nurse will show you how to use the drops and we will give you an information leaflet about this.

Cleaning the eyes

Do not touch the eyes but remove the secretions around the eye using boiled cooled water and the sterile gauze provided. If a sticky yellow or green discharge appears, contact the Eye Clinic, as you may have an infection.

Avoid water entering your eyes from the bath or shower for the first week.

Glasses

If you normally wear glasses then use them as normal after surgery, unless we tell you otherwise.

Activity

For two weeks after surgery, you should:

- avoid dusty environments
- avoid contact sports
- not swim
- not use make-up

At your two week follow-up appointment, the orthoptist or doctor will let you know if it is safe to resume these activities.

What to do if you are concerned

Each day after the surgery, the eye(s) should be less sticky, less gritty and look less red. It doesn't matter how long this takes to settle as long as it is getting better. If the eye(s) should become more red, more sticky or more painful after the surgery, then this may be a sign that there is a problem. If this happens, please call the eye clinic triage team on 01271 314181 and we will arrange an appointment to review your condition.

Follow up

Squint surgery is only a stage in treatment and not the end of treatment. Although the squint may appear much improved after surgery, it is important to keep regular follow up appointments as further orthoptic treatment may be necessary.

Before leaving the Day Surgery Unit, you will be given a two week follow up appointment with the orthoptist and the ophthalmologist.

Further information

Contact numbers:

01271 322466 Eye Clinic Reception

01271 322469 Orthoptic Department

01271 322455 Day Surgery Unit

Useful website:

British and Irish Orthoptic Society
www.orthoaptics.org.uk

Squint Clinic
www.squintclinic.com

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

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'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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