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CONSULTANT OPHTHALMIC, OCULOPLASTIC AND ORBITAL SURGEON

Patient information leaflet

Enucleation

Enucleation is the surgical removal of the entire eye. This operation may be required following a severe eye injury, to control pain in a blind eye, to treat intraocular tumours, to alleviate a severe infection inside the eye or to improve appearance by removing a disfigured eye.

What are the risks?

The operation is usually performed under general anaesthetic (which means that you would be asleep during the operation) although it can be performed under local anaesthetic in selected cases. After removal of the eye, most of the lost volume is replaced by an implant placed in the eye socket. This is usually a sphere made of acrylic and is covered by the patient's own tissue (conjunctiva). In most cases the patient's eye muscles are attached to the implant to preserve movement of the artificial eye (prosthesis).

There are risks associated with any operation. There are small risks associated with general anaesthesia. The main risks of this operation include bleeding, infection, inflammation and breakdown of the wound. Longer-term risks include discharge from the socket, socket irritation and exposure of the ball implant. These complications are rare.

What are the risks of not having the treatment?

The risks of not having the operation depend on the initial indication for surgery but may include a painful blind eye and infection.

Are there any alternatives to this treatment/investigation?

An alternative treatment is called an evisceration. Evisceration is the surgical removal of the contents of the eye, leaving the white coat of the eye (sclera) and eye muscles intact. Painful eyes without useful vision can be managed with evisceration or enucleation. In a disfigured eye without pain, a cosmetic shell may be tried. If tolerated, cosmetic shells can provide a superior cosmetic outcome and better movement than an artificial eye (prosthesis) after removal of the eye itself (evisceration or enucleation).

During the treatment

How long does it take?

The operation usually takes about an hour.

After the treatment/investigation

Will the operation be painful?

There will inevitably be some pain after the operation but this may be managed with painkillers and usually subsides within 24-48 hours. Pain is usually associated with head movement and can be minimised by moving the head and limiting eye movements. Elevating the head at night with 2 or 3 pillows can also help to reduce pain.

What happens afterwards? How long will I be in hospital?

Usually patients are admitted on the day of surgery and discharged home either the same day or the following day.

How long will the dressings stay on?

At the time of surgery, a small clear plastic shell called a conformer is inserted behind your eyelids. This is used to make the eye socket more comfortable and to reduce contraction and scarring of the socket. It also helps to give the eyelids a more natural shape. This conformer will stay in place until you have your prosthesis (artificial eye) fitted.

After the operation, you will be asked to wear a pressure dressing (consisting of a double eye pad and tight taping) for 5 to 7 days. This helps to reduce the swelling caused by the surgery. The dressing will be removed in the outpatients' clinic.

When can I go home and resume my normal activities?

Usually patients are discharged the day after their surgery. You should not return to work until you feel well in yourself. Patients are advised to rest for approximately 2 to 3 weeks before resuming their usual activities including returning to work.

You will be asked to take medications after surgery including painkillers, and eye drops to apply to the eye socket 3 or 4 times a day until your post-operative clinic appointment.

You may clean the eyelids with cool boiled water to remove any mucus. You are advised not to touch the eye socket. You can clean the rest of your face normally.

You can wear eye make-up and swim however it is advisable to wear goggles when swimming and protective eyewear when gardening or undertaking DIY etc.

Will I be able to drive?

You are advised not to drive until you have been reviewed at your post-operative clinic appointment. If you have normal vision in your remaining eye you can continue to drive as long as you can read a number plate from 20.5 metres.

Follow-up

You will be given a post-operative follow-up appointment for 1 week to remove the pressure dressing. You will also require follow up in the longer term as the tissues in the socket may shrink with time which can cause eyelid laxity and affect the fitting of the prosthesis. Careful monitoring of the socket by the artificial eye technician (ocularist) and surgeon will allow detection of changes early on that may require treatment.

Symptoms to report

If you have any concerns after your surgery including pain not relieved by simple painkillers (such as paracetamol or ibuprofen) or bleeding, please contact Miss Mellington (0121 227 0787), your hospital (BMI The Priory 0121 440 2323; Spire Eye Centre, Little Aston 0121 580 7171), your GP (General Practitioner), or NHS Direct (Tel: 111 from any landline or mobile phone free of charge), or your local eye casualty (Birmingham Midland Eye Centre 0121 554 3801).

How long will it be before I get my artificial eye?

Once the socket has healed (about 8 weeks), the ocularist will be able to start making your artificial eye (prosthesis). The front surface of the artificial eye is custom painted to match the other eye. The back surface is moulded to fit your eye socket for maximum comfort and movement,

The prosthesis may be easily removed as needed for cleaning. Most patients sleep with the prosthesis in place. In many patients the prosthesis lasts for decades, though we recommend it is replaced every 7 years or so for optimum cosmetic results.

Will I require further surgery?

In some cases after surgery, the eyelids may appear sunken. An implant may then be placed in the eye socket to increase the socket volume. Eyelid surgery may also be required to improve the cosmetic appearance. This is usually done under local anaesthetic.

Contact details

If you have any questions or are worried about any of the information in this leaflet, please contact Miss Mellington (secretary telephone: 0121 227 0787) or the National Artificial Eye Service, Birmingham and Midland Eye Centre: 0121 507 6740. Monday – Friday 9.00am-5.00pm.