

Blepharoplasty

What is a blepharoplasty?

A blepharoplasty is an operation to remove some of the excess tissue (skin, but sometimes also fat and muscle) from your eyelids. Excess skin (dermatochalasis) and protruding fat can affect either the upper or lower lids, or both. The excess upper lid skin may cause 'hooding' over the eye, impeding the upper part of the vision, or may cause unsightly lower lid 'bags'. Both may lead to a heavy, tired feeling and/or appearance. Sometimes the excess skin can cause tears to track in the wrong direction ('wicking'), leading to a watery eye. Upper lid blepharoplasty surgery can be carried out on the NHS if the excess skin is affecting your vision. It cannot be done in the NHS if it is solely a cosmetic problem.

What are the causes of my condition?

Excess skin on the eyelid is often due to ageing, sun damage or occasionally an underlying medical condition such as thyroid problems. It is sometimes associated with drooping of the upper eyelids ('ptosis' – please see ptosis information sheet). The excess skin may be worsened by the brow descending with age ('brow ptosis'). The excess skin creates folds in the upper lids which can overhang and affect vision. It may affect one or both sides to a greater or lesser extent.

What will happen at my appointment?

In clinic I will take a medical history (discussion of your symptoms, medical and ophthalmic background, medications and your social and family history). It can be very helpful to see old photographs (for example passport or driving licence). I will thoroughly examine you and undertake any appropriate investigations, particularly if a ptosis is detected. This may include blood tests or scans. I take a photograph prior to any procedure so that I can compare your pre- and post-operative appearance. I will then explain your diagnosis and take you through your treatment options. If I think surgery can help I will discuss the risks and benefits of surgery. I may also book you a pre-operative assessment depending on the type of anaesthetic that will be used and any other medical conditions that you may have.

What does surgery involve?

A blepharoplasty operation aims to remove some of the excess skin (and sometimes some muscle and fat) from the upper eyelid. It is a day case procedure and patients normally stay awake for the operation. The skin is marked at the start of the operation with a pen to decide how much is safe to remove. The skin is then numbed with a local anaesthetic

injection. The skin incisions use the natural eyelid creases and the wounds are then closed with sutures. The procedure itself usually takes about 30 minutes per eyelid.

Surgery is usually undertaken with local anaesthetic (injections to numb the eyelids). Sometimes, particularly if a patient is particularly anxious or if they have a head tremor, some sedation may be beneficial.

Is there anything I should do in preparation for surgery?

Unless instructed otherwise you are allowed to eat and drink before your surgery. You can also take your tablet medication as normal, although in some situations I may ask you to stop some blood thinning medications such as Aspirin, Clopidogrel, Warfarin or Apixaban.

If possible it is advisable to stop anti-inflammatory drugs like Ibuprofen (Nurofen), fish oil, ginger, ginseng and garlic supplements at least 2 weeks before surgery.

Avoid heavy alcohol intake in the days before and after surgery. If you are having sedation or general anaesthetic, you are required to have nothing to eat or drink for at least six hours before surgery.

If you are a cigarette smoker then I would recommended that you stop smoking for at least 3 days prior and 1 week after surgery as smoking impairs wound healing and increases the risk of infection.

On the day of surgery please dress casually and wear a top which buttons at the front. Please wash your face on the morning of surgery and ideally men should shave. Do not wear any make-up, jewellery or contact lenses.

What are the risks of blepharoplasty surgery?

Swelling and bruising (sometimes a 'black eye') is to be expected and may last for up to 2-3 weeks. You may have a little bit of bleeding in the first few days after surgery – this can be gently dabbed away with a clean tissue.

Infection can occur after any operation. It is uncommon following eyelid surgery of this type. However, if the wound becomes very red, swollen or tender this would need to be reviewed.

You will have a scar on the eyelid from the surgery. This is usually hidden within the natural eyelid creases and the lid tends to heal very well.

Asymmetry of the eyelids - sometimes there is a difference between the appearance of both upper eyelids after surgery.

Recurrence - despite surgery our tissues continue to age and excess skin may return. If this is the cases then surgery can sometimes be repeated.

Poor eyelid closure - if the eye does not close properly when you blink or when you are asleep, the surface of the eye will be at risk of dryness. Sometimes this is a long-term

problem. The dryness can usually be controlled with lubricant drops and ointment. If the eyes are already slightly dry before surgery, they might be worse after the operation.

Bleeding into deep tissues can lead to disturbance of vision and could lead to loss of vision in severe cases. This is extremely rare, and you should report any loss of vision immediately.

What can I expect after the surgery?

Following surgery, the eye may be padded for a while to reduce swelling, and antibiotic ointment may be prescribed for a few weeks. A friend or relative should be available to take you home as you must not drive immediately following the operation. A review in clinic is organised to check everything has healed well and sometimes stitches may need to be removed.

There will be some discomfort after the operation but this can normally be managed with painkillers and usually subsides within 24-48 hours.

To reduce swelling, extra pillows can be used at night to raise your head above chest level. A cold compress is helpful and can be made using a bag of frozen peas or an ice pack wrapped in a clean pillow case or tea towel. Apply the cold compress for 10 minutes, 5 times daily for 3 days. You can still apply the cold compress to an eye even if there is a dressing over it.

When can I resume my normal activities?

Patients are advised to rest for a day or so before resuming their usual activities, including returning to work when they feel ready. Swimming however should be avoided for 2 to 3 weeks after surgery. You may gently clean the eyelids with cooled boiled water. You can clean the rest of your face normally

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