

Stapedectomy

This leaflet explains more about stapedectomy, the benefits, risks and alternatives, and what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any further questions please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a stapedectomy?

Behind your ear drum sit three hearing bones which move in response to sound. In some people these hearing bones become stiff. When the bones are stiffer fewer sounds travel through the ear and this results in hearing loss. In a stapedectomy one of the bones is replaced with a small metal pin/prosthesis.

Why should I have stapedectomy?

By replacing the stiff hearing bone with a piece of metal or plastic your hearing can be improved and you may not need to wear a hearing aid to help you hear anymore.

What are the risks?

- In some cases, after surgery the hearing only slightly improves and you may still feel the operated ear hearing is still poor, even if we can see an improvement on a hearing test.
- When we examine the hearing bones during the procedure, there is a small chance that if bones don't appear to be stiff. If this happens, the operation will stop and you will be woken up; you would require a hearing aid in this scenario. It is normal to get a few days of dizziness, in some cases this can last more than a week
- There is a small chance of tinnitus (noise in the ear). If you already have tinnitus it often gets better, although sometimes the tinnitus will stay the same, but it rarely gets worse.
- Some people experience a change in their taste at the front of the tongue on the same side as the operated ear. This is because the taste nerve runs underneath your eardrum and can become stretched or damaged during the operation.
- Sometimes you can get an infection in the operated ear which may affect the outcome of the hearing afterwards.
- In less than one per cent of patients the hearing becomes worse and, in some cases, completely disappears. In this situation not even a hearing aid would allow you to hear using that ear. You may also experience severe dizziness if this happens; this can take months to recover from, and require specialist physiotherapy to help your balance.
- Very rarely, the ear drum may get a small tear when being lifted. This would be repaired during the same operation.
- The facial nerve which is responsible for movement of the facial muscles runs very close to the area of surgery. There have been reports of this nerve being damaged during surgery, but this is very rare.
- Delayed weakness of the face – this can happen 10-14 days after having your surgery. It is often associated with picking up a simple virus or cold after surgery in less than 0.5% of cases. If this type of face weakness happens the majority of patients will make a full recovery.

Are there any alternatives?

You do not have to have surgery to be able to hear people better. You can use a hearing aid and, in some cases, people manage without any additional hearing support.

How can I prepare for stapedectomy?

- You will need to have had a hearing test three months before your operation. If you think you need another hearing test prior to the surgery, please contact the Admissions team
- Arrange two weeks off work (if you require a sick certificate please ask the nurse on the day of your surgery)
- Arrange for someone to come and pick you up after the surgery. This is because you cannot drive for 24 hours after a general anaesthetic. Occasionally the procedure is performed under local anaesthetic
- Bring all the medication you are currently taking with you on the day of your surgery
- Make sure you have pain killers at home such as paracetamol and ibuprofen (unless your GP has told you can't take these drugs)
- Inform the hospital if you have a cold, flu or tonsillitis in the two weeks before admission as your operation may need to be postponed.

Asking for your consent

It is important that you feel involved in decisions about your care. For some treatments you will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you agree to have the treatment and understand what it involves. You can withdraw your consent at any time even if you have said yes previously. If you would like more details about our consent process please ask for a copy of our policy.

What happens during a stapedectomy?

Please remember that your surgeon will confirm how your surgery is performed and finalise your aftercare plan with you, as practices sometimes slightly vary. The below is a general guide.

The surgery can take one to two hours. The operation will sometimes require a small cut just in front of the ear, behind the ear, or sometimes no cut at all. Your surgeon will discuss with you how your operation will be done.

A protective antiseptic gauze or sponge is placed in the ear at the end of the operation to protect the ear whilst the healing starts. If a cut has been made in front of or behind the ear this is closed with sutures that dissolve.

Will I feel any pain?

It is common to experience a dull, occasionally throbbing pain in the ear after the surgery. Most patients don't require more than simple painkillers.

What happens after a stapedectomy?

You normally have to stay in the hospital three to four hours after a general anaesthetic. Occasionally if it gets too late you may have to stay overnight.

There will often be a yellow antiseptic ribbon in the ear canal to protect things while healing takes place. There is often a squelching sound or popping in the ear when chewing or yawning, this is normal. The ear will often leak fluid for several days to weeks after the surgery, this is also normal. Occasionally you may see bright red blood.

What do I need to do after I go home?

- There will be cotton wool at the entrance to the canal; you need to change this when it gets soaked with liquid. This may be several times a day immediately after surgery but may be only once a day a few days after surgery. Please insert a new piece of cotton wool at least once a day.
- Try to sneeze with your mouth open, and don't blow your nose for the first two weeks after surgery to prevent build-up of pressure in the ear. You may sniff as needed.
- You should keep the ear dry until your surgeon tells you that you can get it wet: ask at your post-op appointment. When washing hair please cover the ear canal with a piece of cotton wool covered in Vaseline. In addition, you can use an empty clean yoghurt carton, or similar, to put over the ear and it is easier if there is someone to help you. Being able to go swimming depends upon type of surgery and healing speed, so please ask your surgeon.
- Work/school: You should be off work for 10-14 days, depending upon how you feel. One of the main reasons is to try to prevent you picking up a cold when mixing with other people. If you feel up to it, and have the sort of job that allows, you may be able to work from home within about five days. If you need a medical certificate for your employer, please ask your nurse before you leave hospital, otherwise your GP can give you one.
- You cannot fly for four weeks after this procedure.
- Please don't lift any heavy objects or strain on the toilet (please stool softeners aka laxatives if you suffer with constipation) for four weeks after the operation.
- If you decide to SCUBA dive after this operation, there is a risk that the piece of metal used to replace the hearing bone may move and you may find your hearing gets worse. The decision to SCUBA dive is your choice but not something we recommend.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Yes, you will be asked to return to the clinic to check your progress or to have any ear pack/dressing removed. Usually you will be asked to come to the clinic two to four weeks after the operation.

Useful sources of information

You may visit www.nhs.uk, www.patient.co.uk and <https://www.entuk.org/patient-information-leaflets> to read more about stapedectomy surgery.