Surgery for benign scrotal lumps

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Discovery has made every effort to ensure that we obtained the information in this brochure from a reputable source. We have adapted the content to reflect the South African market or healthcare environment.

You should not only depend on the information we have provided when you make any decisions about your treatment. The information is meant to act only as a guide to the treatment you are considering having. Please discuss any questions you may have about your treatment with your treating healthcare professional.
What is a benign scrotal lump?
A benign scrotal lump is a lump in your scrotum that is not caused by a cancer. Your surgeon has recommended an operation to remove the lump in your scrotum. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

About this document
We understand this can be a stressful time as you deal with different emotions and sometimes have questions after seeing your surgeon. This document will give you a basic understanding about your operation. We tell you about the things you can do to help make the operation a success. It is also important to remember to tell your surgeon about any medicine you are on so he or she can manage this, if necessary. It will also tell you about what to expect after the operation – while in hospital and in the long term. Your surgeon remains the best person to speak to about any questions or concerns you may have about the operation.

How does a benign scrotal lump happen?
There are three types of benign scrotal lump.
• A hydrocele is a build-up of fluid around a testicle (see figure 1). There is a sheath around your testicle that contains a small amount of fluid. Fluid can build up because of an injury or inflammation. In some tropical climates, infection can cause a hydrocele.
• An epididymal cyst is a collection of fluid in the epididymis (a tube-like structure that stores sperm) (see figure 2). Sperm drains out of small ducts and some of these can get blocked, causing a build-up of fluid. The sperm count is not affected as there are lots of other ducts.
• A sperm granuloma is a small painful swelling caused by sperm sometimes leaking following a vasectomy. A vasectomy involves cutting both the tubes (vas deferens) that carry sperm from your testicles.

What are the benefits of surgery?
If the lump is large, surgery will ease any discomfort you may have and make it easier for you to walk.
If you want to have children, it is best to leave an epididymal cyst alone. Surgery in the area of the epididymis can cause scarring which reduces your fertility.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?
The fluid can be removed using a needle but the fluid usually builds up again. It is possible to inject a medicine that prevents the fluid from coming back but this may be uncomfortable and can cause an infection.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?
The lump will not usually settle without treatment. If the lump is small and is not tender, it can be left alone. A large lump can be tender, cause discomfort or pain, and make it difficult to walk.
A hydrocele can get infected. If antibiotics do not effectively treat the infection, you will need another operation to remove the infected tissue.

**What does the operation involve?**
The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for. You can help by confirming to your surgeon and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having. The operation is usually performed under a general anaesthetic. Sometimes a spinal anaesthetic is used. Your anaesthetist will discuss the options with you and recommend the best form of anaesthesia for you. You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection. The operation usually takes 20 to 50 minutes.

Your surgeon will make a small cut on your scrotum. For a hydrocele, your surgeon will remove the fluid from the sheath. To prevent the fluid from coming back, your surgeon will either remove the sheath or stitch it together.

Your surgeon will remove an epididymal cyst. This will usually involve removing part of or all the epididymus. Your surgeon will close the small cut with stitches.

**What should I do about my medicine?**
Let your doctor know about all the medicine you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medicine as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medicine you can buy over the counter.

**What can I do to help make the operation a success?**
If you smoke, stopping smoking several weeks or more before the operation may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health. Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

You can reduce your risk of infection in a surgical wound.

- Part of your scrotum may need to be shaved before the operation. You will either be asked to do this yourself when you are in hospital or the healthcare team will do it for you.
- Try to have a bath or shower either the day before or on the day of the operation and make sure your scrotum is clean.
- Keep warm around the time of the operation. Let the healthcare team know if you feel cold.

**What complications can happen?**
The healthcare team will try to make the operation as safe as possible but complications can happen. Some of these can be serious and can even cause death. You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Your doctor may be able to tell you what the risk of a complication for you is.

1. **Complications of anaesthesia**
   Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

2. **General complications of any operation**
   - Pain is usually only mild and easily controlled with simple painkillers. If you have severe pain, let your surgeon know.
   - Bleeding during or after the operation (risk: 1 in 6). It is common for your scrotum to be bruised. If your surgeon is concerned that the bleeding is heavy, they may insert a drain (tube) in your wound. Heavy bleeding can cause a large clot and swelling in your scrotum.

3. **Specific complications of this operation**
   - Difficulty passing urine. You may need a catheter (tube) in your bladder for one to two days.
   - Infection of the surgical site (wound) (risk: 1 in 10). This is usually mild. It is usually safe to shower after two days but you should check with the healthcare team. Let the healthcare team know if you get a high temperature, notice pus in your wound, or if your wound becomes red, sore or painful. An infection usually settles with antibiotics but you may need another operation.
   - Reduced fertility if the surgery is to treat an epididymal cyst. Surgery in the area of the epididymis can cause scarring which reduces fertility.
How soon will I recover?

• **In hospital**

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area. You should be able to go home the same day or the day after. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay a little longer.

If you do go home the same day, a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. Be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

Wearing a scrotal support or firm underwear will help ease any discomfort, and minimise bruising and swelling.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

• **Returning to normal activities**

Do not drive, operate machinery or do any potentially dangerous activities (this includes cooking) for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination.

If you had a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

Do not do outdoor activities for two days. Do not do strenuous exercise, like running and riding a bicycle, for 5 to 7 days. Most men can return to normal activities after two to four weeks.

If you notice swelling or have a discharge from your wounds, or still have pain after four weeks, contact your doctor.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Do not drive until your doctor tells you that you can.

• **The future**

Most men make a good recovery. Sometimes the lump comes back. There is usually more than one epididymal cyst and surgery can only treat the larger ones. If the smaller ones get larger, the problem will come back. For a hydrocele, surgery usually cures the problem but fluid can build up again and you may need another operation (risk: 1 in 20).

**Summary**

A benign scrotal lump is a lump in your scrotum that is not caused by a cancer. Most of them can be left alone but some cause problems and can be treated by surgery.

Surgery is usually safe and effective but complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

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

**Acknowledgements**

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