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Surgery for Benign Scrotal Lumps

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What is a benign scrotal lump?

A benign scrotal lump is a lump in the 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. This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you make an informed decision.

If you have any questions that this document does not answer, you should ask your surgeon or any member of the healthcare team.

How does a benign scrotal lump happen?

There are two types of benign scrotal lump.

- A hydrocele is a build-up of fluid around a testicle (see figure 1). There is a sheath around the 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.

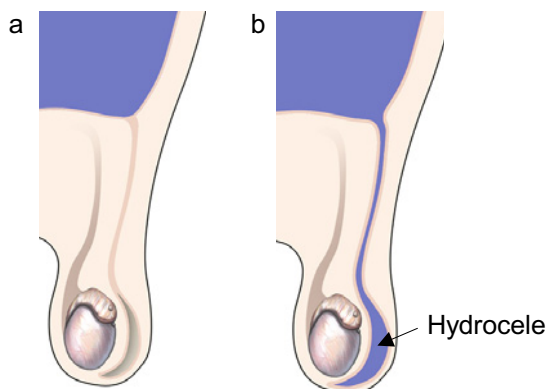


Figure 1

a Normal testicle

b 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.

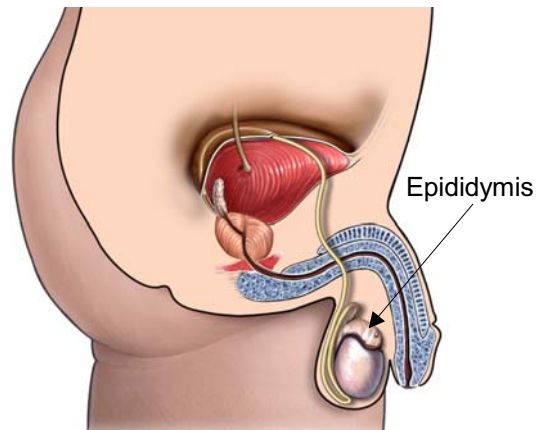


Figure 2

Position of the epididymis

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 drug that stops the fluid from coming back. However, 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 go away without treatment. However, 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 an 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.

Surgery to remove benign scrotal lumps 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 between twenty and fifty minutes.

Your surgeon will make a small cut in your scrotum. For a hydrocele, your surgeon will remove the fluid from the sheath. To stop the fluid 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 or all of the epididymus.

At the end of the operation, your surgeon will close the small cut with stitches.

What should I do about my medication?

You should let your doctor know about all the medication you are on and follow their advice. This includes herbal remedies and medication to control diabetes and blood pressure. If you are on beta-blockers, you should continue to take them as normal. You may need to stop taking warfarin or clopidogrel before your operation.

What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking several weeks or more before an operation may reduce your chances of getting complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher chance of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help prepare you for the operation, help you recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask a member of 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 your operation. You will either be asked to do this yourself when you are in hospital or a member of the healthcare team will do it for you.

- Try to have a bath or shower either the day before or on the day of your operation and make sure your scrotum is clean.

- Keep warm around the time of your operation. Let a member of the healthcare team know if you are cold.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make your operation as safe as possible. However, 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. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of men who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

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**, which happens with every operation. It is usually mild and controlled with simple painkillers. If you have severe pain, you should let your surgeon know.

- **Bleeding** during or after surgery (risk: 1 in 6). It is common for the scrotum to bruise. If your surgeon thinks you may have significant bleeding, they may place a drain (small tube) in the wound. Severe bleeding can cause a large clot and swelling in the scrotum.

- **Difficulty passing urine**. You may need a catheter (tube) in your bladder for a day or two.

3 Specific complications of this operation

- **Infection of the surgical site** (wound) (risk: 1 in 10). This is usually mild. It is usually safe to shower after 48 hours. However, you should check with a member of the healthcare team. Let your surgeon know if you get a 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. You should 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.

The healthcare team will tell you if you need to have any stitches removed or dressings changed.

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

• Returning to normal activities

You should not drive, operate machinery (this includes cooking) or do any potentially dangerous activities 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.

Avoid outdoor activities for 48 hours and strenuous activities, like running and riding a bicycle, for five to seven days. Most men can return to normal activities within 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, you should ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check your insurance policy and with your doctor.

• 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 bigger, the problem will come back. For a hydrocele, surgery usually cures the problem. However, fluid can build up again and you may need another operation (risk: 1 in 20).

Summary

Lumps in the scrotum are common. Most of them can be left alone. However, some cause problems and can be treated by surgery.

Surgery is usually safe and effective. However, complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you 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 a healthcare professional.

Acknowledgements

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