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UG13lite Elective Splenectomy

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This document will give you information about an elective splenectomy. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is the spleen?

The spleen's main functions are to filter old and damaged red blood cells and to produce lymphocytes that fight infections (see figure 1).

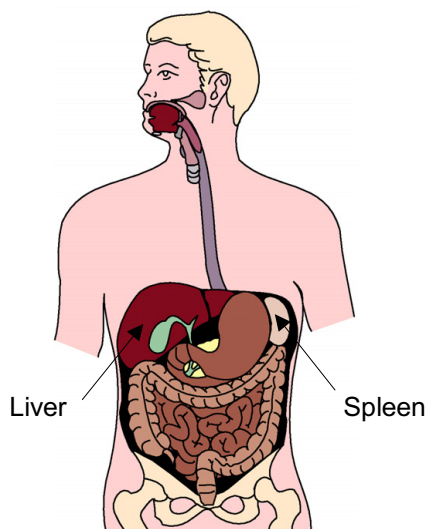


Figure 1

The position of the spleen

The main reasons for having an elective splenectomy are associated with problems with your blood. A splenectomy may also be recommended because of problems that can cause your spleen to get bigger.

What are the benefits of surgery?

A splenectomy can help to control your symptoms and, if your spleen has got bigger, will remove the life-threatening risk of your spleen rupturing.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

If you have a problem with your blood, it is possible to have drug treatment.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes between one and two hours.

Your surgeon will remove the spleen either by using the laparoscopic (keyhole) technique or by an open cut in the upper abdomen or under the right ribcage.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring
- Developing a hernia in the scar
- Blood clots

2 Specific complications

- Damage to internal organs
- Developing a hernia near one of the cuts
- Surgical emphysema
- Rise in platelet count
- Damage to your stomach or bowel
- Damage to your pancreas
- Post-splenectomy sepsis

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home within a day or two after laparoscopic surgery, and between five and seven days after open surgery.

You should be able to return to work after three to four weeks depending on the extent of surgery and your type of work.

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.

You will need to take antibiotics and be immunised regularly.

Summary

An elective splenectomy is usually recommended for certain problems with your blood and to remove the life-threatening risk of your spleen rupturing.

Acknowledgements

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