

LOCAL EXCISION



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This information aims to help you understand the operation, what is involved and some common complications that may occur. It may help answer some of your questions and help you think of other questions that you may want to ask your cancer care team; it is not intended to replace advice or discussion between you and your cancer care team.

AN OVERVIEW TO LOCAL EXCISION

- Local excision of a head and neck cancer is the general term used to describe the removal or 'cutting out' of any cancerous tissue.
- Local excision can be done using one or more of a variety of surgical devices, such as a surgical scalpel or scissors, electrocautery (diathermy), surgical lasers and robotic devices ([transoral robotic surgery \[TORS\]](#)).
- Local excision may have a different name depending on the site of the tumour.

For further information about the specific surgery to remove a particular cancer and what to expect, refer to the [Head and Neck Cancer Australia website](#).

WHY IS LOCAL EXCISION NEEDED?

- Surgery to remove cancer is an important part of treatment for many head and neck cancers. It helps to increase the chance of survival from the cancer.
- Regardless of the tool or surgical approach used, local excision aims to cut out the cancer together with an area of normal-appearing tissue, known as a margin. This helps to reduce the chance of any cancer cells being left behind.
- Tissue removed from the local excision will be examined in detail by a specialist pathologist, under a microscope to look for cancer cells. Through this examination, the cancer can be accurately staged. Further information about staging of cancer is available on the [Head and Neck Cancer Australia website](#).

HOW TO PREPARE FOR OPERATION

Before the operation:

- Sometimes a local excision is done under a general anaesthetic (with you asleep) and sometimes it is done using local anaesthetic, where you will be awake or sedated.
- If you are having a general anaesthetic you will need to fast (have nothing to eat or drink) for 6 hours before your operation (unless advised differently by your surgeon or anaesthetist).
- Your surgeon will explain the details of your operation. Be sure to bring up any questions or concerns, and share your needs and wishes with your cancer care team.
- You should speak to your doctor about how to manage aspects of your lifestyle, such as smoking, drinking alcohol and chronic conditions (e.g. diabetes and obesity) that may increase the risk of complications.
 - If you take blood thinning medication for a heart condition or blood clots (such as warfarin, Plavix, aspirin or Pradaxa), make sure your surgeon is aware. Some of these medications need to be stopped more than a week before the operation. Sometimes a short-acting blood thinner (such as Clexane) is used before and after the surgery.
- Talk to your surgeon about what reconstruction will be needed after the local excision as a defect will be present that, depending on the size and location, may be repaired by a simple direct closure, or require a more complex [reconstruction](#).
- Also talk to your surgeon and [cancer care team](#) about any likely side effects you can expect following the operation. You may find it useful to talk to a dietitian, speech pathologist or specialist head and neck nurse about these issues.

POSSIBLE RISKS OF LOCAL EXCISION

All operations carry some risks such as blood clots, wound infections, bleeding, chest infection, adverse reactions to anaesthetic, and other complications. These risks will be explained by your cancer specialist and anaesthetist.

Your doctor will explain details of the operation, general risks and side effects of the operation, they may recommend:

- stopping blood thinners (e.g. aspirin) before surgery to reduce the risk of bleeding

- a blood thinner (called heparin) may be injected before and after surgery to reduce the risk of blood clots
- antibiotics to reduce to risk of wound infection
- early mobilisation to reduce the risk of blood clots and chest infection
- special stockings to reduce the risk of blood clots.

SIDE EFFECTS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

As with all operations, there is a chance that local excision may lead to a number of side effects. You may not experience all of the side effects. Speak with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about treatment side effects.

Side effects common for local excision may include:

- **Nausea:** General anaesthetic may cause nausea. This will settle down soon after the operation and can be treated with medications.
- **Sore throat:** Your throat may be sore initially if a breathing tube was used/placed during the operation.
- **Pain management:** Your anaesthetist will give you pain medicine during the operation to keep you comfortable when you wake up, and you may continue on pain medicines to ensure pain is under control. Ensure you take pain relief medications as prescribed by your doctor and speak to your cancer care team if the pain is not under control, gets worse or if the medication causes any side effects. You may want to download further information about [pain management](#), which is available on the [Head and Neck Cancer Australia website](#).
- **Swelling:** A surgical cut in the skin often results in swelling, which usually goes away as the wound heals. A surgical drain may be used to remove excess fluid.
- **Change in your appearance:** Your appearance may change and you may have a scar from the cut made during the operation; it may be hard to accept. Seek support from the cancer care team, and family and friends. Contacting other patients may also assist. Reconstructive surgery may be recommended to help your appearance.

- **Effects on speech:** Your speech may be affected by your surgery and a speech pathologist may assist.
- **Difficulty swallowing:** Many patients find it difficult to eat after the operation but this is likely to be temporary. A speech pathologist and dietitian will usually be involved in your care.

You may want to write specific questions here to ask your doctor or cancer care team

About Head and Neck Cancer Australia

Head and Neck Cancer Australia (formerly Beyond Five) is Australia's only charity dedicated to providing information and support to people living with head and neck cancer, caregivers, family and healthcare professionals.

Head and Neck Cancer Australia's mission is to improve the quality of life of everyone affected by head and neck cancer through education and access to support and to raise awareness of head and neck cancer nationally.

Head and Neck Cancer Australia supports people through their cancer journey, from diagnosis to treatment and life after cancer by providing comprehensive, easy to understand and easy to access information. We have the only Directory of Head and Neck Cancer services and support groups available in Australia and New Zealand helping people to find the right services and support when they need it most.

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