

Seroma Aspiration

This information sheet is for patients that have a seroma that requires aspiration (drainage) following surgery. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a seroma?

A seroma is a collection of straw coloured fluid under the skin that can occur after an operation. It can occur when tissue is removed from the body during an operation leaving a space which sometimes fills with fluid. This space eventually gets filled with scar tissue but until this occurs the seroma can collect. The body will often re-absorb the fluid itself without any intervention but this may take weeks to months to resolve.

In some cases if there is an excessive amount of fluid, the seroma is very painful or it is putting a strain on the stitch line from surgery, it may have to be drained (aspirated).

What does seroma aspiration involve?

A nurse or doctor trained in seroma aspiration will carry out the procedure.

- Your skin will be cleansed around the area of the seroma
- A needle will be inserted (often through the existing stitch line) and attached to a syringe or drainage bottle. This is usually painless as the area is often still numb from surgery but should be no more than a "pin prick" sensation.
- The fluid will then be drawn out (aspirated) until the area is relatively flat or no more can be aspirated.
- A small dressing will be placed over the area.
- Depending on the part of the body, you may be advised to wear a compression garment if tolerated to apply pressure over the affected area to help prevent the seroma from re-occurring, e.g. if in the groin or chest.
- If the seroma is not resolving despite aspiration the team may arrange an ultrasound scan that estimates the size of the collection and in some cases uses this to guide a full aspiration. If there is a need for this it will be discussed with you by one of the team.

What are the specific risks?

- Infection - Although every precaution is taken to avoid infection, inserting a needle into skin provides an entry point for bacteria which can lead to an infection. If you notice signs of redness, increased pain and swelling you need to seek medical intervention immediately. You can contact the Plastic Dressing Clinic, attend your GP or visit the Urgent Care Centre at St. George's – whichever means you get seen on the day you notice these signs.
- Re-occurrence of the seroma – It is common for the seroma to re-occur as the space underneath the skin where fluid collects can take some time to fill with scar tissue. If this occurs and you do not have another appointment to be seen in the Plastic Dressing Clinic please contact the appointment line on 020 8725 5855 to arrange another review.
- Bleeding - There is a risk of causing bleeding when carrying out the aspiration. This will be dealt with at the time.

- Pneumothorax - There is a very small risk of pneumothorax if the aspiration is in the chest or back area. This means air enters the plural cavity and results in shortness of breath. This would occur at the time of the aspiration and would be dealt with by the team.

What happens if I do not have the seroma aspirated?

Most seromas will resolve in time. However, if the swelling is putting strain on the stitch line it may start leaking through the stitch line. In very few cases the seroma forms a capsule and becomes permanent. This can only be treated with surgery to remove the capsule but is rare.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Depending on the amount of fluid aspirated you may be given an appointment or advised to make a further appointment if the fluid re-collects.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns after having a seroma aspiration, please contact the plastic dressing clinic nurses on 020 8725 0473 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) or the lead clinical nurse in plastic surgery on 020 8672 1071 or call 020 8725 1255 and ask for bleep number 6332 (Monday to Thursday, 8am to 5pm).

Out of hours, please contact Keate ward on 020 8725 3226 or 3227.

For appointments, please call 020 8725 5855.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

