

ERCP Patient Information

This leaflet explains about your ERCP and what you can expect when you come to hospital. It also details the instructions on how to prepare for this procedure, including when to stop eating and what tablets you may need to stop.

Important information about your procedure

- St George's is a national training centre for endoscopy. Students and qualified trainees may be involved in your care. If you do not want students to be present, please inform the doctor or nurse when you are admitted.
- It is necessary to have sedation for this procedure, therefore, you will need to arrange for a friend or relative (18+) to escort you home after your appointment and to be with you for at least 12 hours. We kindly ask escorts not to wait in the Endoscopy Unit due to limited space, but we will call when the procedure is completed.
- **STOP EATING SIX HOURS** before your appointment, clear fluids are allowed (**no milk**).
- We recommend you bring a book or magazine with you to read whilst you are waiting as the mobile phone signal is weak.

Important information about medication

- If you are taking medications for **diabetes** or to **prevent blood clots** such as Warfarin, Apixaban, Edoxaban, Rivaroxaban, Dabigatran, Clopidogrel, Ticagrelor or Prasugrel, please follow the instructions provided by the nurse. If you have not been contacted, please **contact us** on **020 8725 1913**.
- Take other medications as normal.
- Please bring a list of your regular medications and bring any inhalers or sprays with you.
- If you are diabetic, please bring your medication and a snack to eat after the procedure.

What is ERCP?

ERCP stands for endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatogram. This is a type of endoscopy designed to treat diseases affecting the bile or pancreatic ducts. These ducts drain the liver and gall bladder and the pancreatic fluid from the pancreas into the small bowel.

The ERCP is a camera examination with an endoscope, via the mouth, to reach these ducts.

The procedure itself takes 30 to 60 minutes, but please allow up to four hours in the hospital for the whole process to be completed. It is necessary for sedation to be used for this procedure.

What are the risks?

The procedure is safe and well tolerated under sedation, but rarely there can be a problem, for example:

- The sedative can affect your breathing making it slow and shallow.

- Inflammation of the pancreas called “pancreatitis.” This risk of this happening is 2-5% and leads to abdominal pain that can take a few days to settle. Even more rarely it can be severe requiring admission to hospital for a week or more. Fatal cases have been known but this is extremely rare occurring in less than 1:2,000 patients undergoing ERCP.
- Bleeding can rarely occur as part of an incision, called a sphincterotomy, which is often required to access and treat the bile duct.
- Perforation, which is a tear in the wall of the upper intestine is rare (1:200 risk). If this happens it would require a stay in hospital including treatment with antibiotics and possibly surgical repair.

Although ERCP carries risks, it is only carried out when the doctors have carefully considered the risks of doing this test compared with doing any other test or operation and the risk of doing nothing. Your doctor will be happy to discuss this with you further.

Are there any alternatives?

Scans with ultrasound, CT or MRI are often undertaken but unlike ERCP they do not allow treatment to be given. Percutaneous transhepatic cholangiogram (PTC) can treat blockages of the bile duct caused by stones or tumours. This is associated with a slightly higher complication risk than ERCP but may be necessary in some situations where ERCP is not successful. It requires a short stay in hospital and a temporary bile drainage bag outside of the abdomen.

Asking for your consent

It is important that you feel involved in decisions about your care. You will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you agree to have the treatment and understand what it involves. You can withdraw your consent at any time, even if you have said ‘yes’ previously.

Advice for diabetic patients

The period of starvation can upset your diabetes temporarily. A nurse will contact you with advice on how to manage your diabetes whilst you are fasting. If you have not been contacted, please contact us on **020 8725 1913** and ask to speak to the pre-admission nurses. Alternatively, you may wish to speak to your diabetic nurse for advice.

On arrival at the endoscopy unit

- A nurse will check your details, including medications and allergies
- The procedure will be explained again and you will be asked to sign a consent form
- An intravenous cannula will be inserted and secured before the start of the procedure.

What happens during ERCP?

- A local anaesthetic spray is used to numb the back of your throat; this has a slightly bitter taste. The effect will wear off shortly after the completion of the procedure.
- A sedative injection is given. It makes you relaxed and, in most cases, drowsy or sleepy. It can affect memory of the procedure in some patients.
- The ERCP endoscope is gently inserted via your mouth into your stomach. This is not painful and will not make breathing or swallowing difficult. The nurse may need to clear saliva from your

mouth using a small suction tube. If you gag you won't vomit as your stomach will be empty. The procedure takes approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

- It is commonplace to remove gallstones from the bile duct during the procedure and to place a stent (a small hollow tube to allow bile to flow through any blockage). The stents are not designed for long term use and arrangements will be made to remove them after a certain time, usually three to six months.
- Biopsy samples are often taken to help diagnosis and treatment.

Will I feel any pain?

You may feel some discomfort from the air that is pumped into the stomach. Abdominal pain can occur after the procedure but usually passes quickly. More long-lasting pain can indicate the onset of pancreatitis. You will often be given a rectal suppository of an anti-inflammatory painkiller (diclofenac) during the procedure to lessen the risk of pancreatitis.

What happens after the ERCP?

Following the procedure, you will be taken to the recovery area and you will be monitored for approximately one hour. After this you will usually be able to get dressed and have refreshments. A nurse will give you a copy of the ERCP report as well as a discharge information leaflet with important advice.

You must arrange for somebody to accompany you home. The medication given during the procedure will prohibit you from driving for 24 hours after the examination. If you are unable to arrange transportation or do not wish to take public transport, we can arrange a taxi to take you home, however you are responsible for the fare. You will need a responsible adult at home for at least 12 hours. A nurse will give you a copy of the endoscopy report as well as some important discharge advice.

Will I get the results / Will I have a follow-up appointment?

We will give you a copy of the ERCP report and discuss the findings with you before you are discharged. We will be able to tell you of any visual findings, but any samples will be sent to the laboratory for testing. This can take up to six weeks. A copy of the report and any histology results will be sent to your referring doctor and your GP. If required, a follow up appointment will be requested and will be sent to you by post/text/or by phone.

Is there anything I need to watch out for after the procedure?

It is normal to experience a mild sore throat for up to 48 hours following the procedure, simple lozenges will help. You may also feel bloated from the air that was pumped into your stomach. This is normal and will pass.

However, if you have **any severe pain** (neck chest or abdomen) within the first 24 hours, **vomiting** or **black tarry stools** please contact the Endoscopy Unit, Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm on 020 8725 1913 and ask to speak to the nurse in charge. Outside of working hours, please go to your local Emergency department or alternatively, you can call your GP or NHS 111.

When can I get back to my normal routine?

You should be able to return to work and all your usual activities within 48 hours. Please be advised you cannot drive, sign legal documents, or drink alcohol for 24 hours following sedation.

Where do I go?

Please attend the Endoscopy Unit, St George's Hospital, First floor, St James' Wing, Blackshaw Road, London, SW17 0QT.

Is there parking at the hospital?

There is a car park with the entrance located on Blackshaw Road. Please ensure you check the rates before parking.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your procedure, please contact the Endoscopy Unit on 020 8725 1913 Monday to Friday 9 am to 5pm.

Useful sources of information

[ERCP \(Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography\) | Patient](#)

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 advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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