NHS
Royal Cornwall Hospitals
NHS Trust

Surfer's ear









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What is surfer's ear?

Over many years exposure to cold water and cold winds causes the bony walls of the ear canal to grow bony lumps on them. We call these lumps 'exostoses'. They narrow the ear canal.

Why do I need an operation?

When the ear canal becomes very narrow, wax and other debris start to accumulate in it. This can lead to repeated infections of the ear canal, particularly on exposure to water. If completely closed, the blockage can cause hearing loss.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is done under general anaesthetic. The surgeon will remove the bony lumps from your ear canal using a small chisel and/or drill. When you wake up you will have some packing in your ear. This will stay in for two weeks, until you are seen in the clinic.

Please note that local NHS waiting list policy indicates that you will be offered no more than two dates for surgery. If you decline these dates you will not be offered another.

What are the possible risks or complications?

These include:

- pain
- infection
- bleeding
- failure to solve the problem
- perforated eardrum
- damage to the nerve at the same side of your face (this is very rare)
- damage to your jaw joint
- hearing loss and/or tinnitus (this is rare).

What is the expected outcome?

Surfer's ear can reoccur with further exposure to cold water.

What can I expect after the operation?

- Surgery is usually undertaken as a day case. You will need someone to collect you from hospital and stay with you overnight.
- Your ear may be painful for several weeks. You will be given some painkillers to take home.
- You may have a bandage over your ear/head when you wake up. This can be removed before you go home, or may be left overnight for you to remove in the morning. Removing the bandage is straightforward; underneath the bandage is some gauze or 'wadding' that will fall away easily from your skin. The packing in your ear canal should be left (it is yellow in colour). If you have any concerns about this youn ring the ward for advice at any time.
- You will need to take up to two weeks off work.
- Your ear will have some packing in it. We will see you two weeks after surgery to remove the pack.
- Some discharge from your ear is normal whilst the pack is in your ear. If some of the packing starts to fall out, cut it off with a small clean pair of scissors and leave the rest. If it falls out completely you should ring the ward to ask for advice.

When can I surf again?

You must keep your ear dry until your surgeon says it is safe to get it wet. **No surfing** until then. This may be up to two or three months.

Once you do start surfing again you should wear earplugs to keep your ears dry and protect them from cold water.

Will I need any follow-up?

It is usual to see you about two months after the pack has been removed to check your ear and hearing – if it has healed well you will be discharged at that point and may start surfing again.

Further information

For further information, or if you have any problems contact Wheal Coates ward on: 01872 253830.