

Elective Splenectomy

UG13 Lite - Expires end of January 2023



This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is your spleen?

Your spleen is an organ in the upper left-hand side of your abdomen underneath your ribcage. Your spleen's main functions are to filter old and damaged red blood cells from your blood, and to produce lymphocytes (special white blood cells) that fight infections.

What are the benefits of surgery?

The main reasons for having an elective (non-emergency) splenectomy are associated with problems with your blood.

- Abnormal reduction in the number of red blood cells (anaemia) or blood platelets.
- Abnormal increase in the number of white blood cells if you have leukaemia or lymphoma.

A large spleen is dangerous because there is a higher risk of it rupturing (bursting).

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

If you have a problem with your blood, it is possible to have medication to cure or manage the problem.

It is possible to have regular blood transfusions but this is only a temporary measure.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes 1 to 2 hours.

Your surgeon will separate your spleen from the surrounding organs. They will tie off the blood supply to your spleen using metal clips. Your surgeon will place a bag around your spleen and remove it.

Laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery

Your surgeon will make a small cut on or near your belly button. They will make several small cuts on your abdomen so they can insert tubes (ports) into your abdomen. Your surgeon will insert surgical instruments through the ports along with a telescope so they can see inside your abdomen and perform the operation.

Open surgery

The operation is the same but it is performed through a larger cut on your upper abdomen or under your ribcage.

What complications can happen?

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death.

General complications of any operation

- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- Developing a hernia in the scar
- Blood clot in your leg
- Blood clot in your lung
- Chest infection

Specific complications of this operation

Keyhole surgery complications

- Surgical emphysema (a crackling sensation in your skin caused by trapped carbon dioxide)
- Damage to structures such as your bowel, liver or blood vessels
- Developing a hernia near one of the cuts used to insert the ports
- Gas embolism

Splenectomy complications

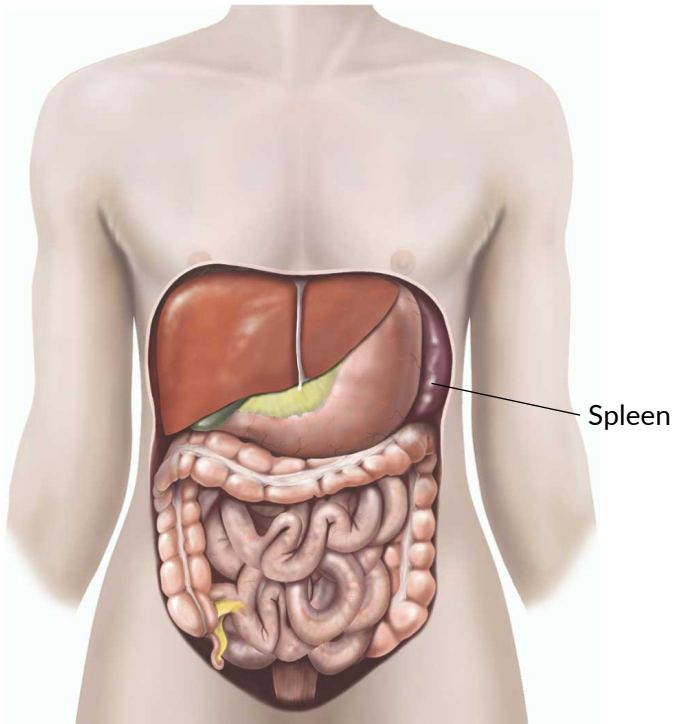
- Rise in platelet count
- Damage to your stomach or bowel
- Damage to your pancreas

Long-term problems

- Tissues can join together in an abnormal way (adhesions)
- Post-splenectomy sepsis, which is a life-threatening infection caused by bacteria

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring of your skin



The position of the spleen

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after 1 to 2 days if you had keyhole surgery or after 5 to 7 days if you had open surgery.

You should be able to return to work after 3 to 4 weeks, depending on how much surgery you need and your type of work.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a good recovery.

Summary

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

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

Acknowledgements

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