

Syringe and probing of the nasolacrimal (tear) ducts in children

This procedure is used for unblocking the tear ducts of children. It takes place in the Day Surgery Unit under a general anaesthetic.

The tear duct (nasolacrimal duct) is a tiny passage running from the inner corner of the eyelids to the inside of the nose. It draws away the tears and mucus that the eye constantly produces. A blocked tear duct is a fairly common problem in children and causes watery, sticky eyes. These symptoms frequently resolve before the age of 1, but in some cases, an operation is needed to clear the blockage.

The procedure to unblock the duct takes approximately 5-10 minutes. It involves passing a very fine flexible wire down one or both tear ducts to remove the blockage. The duct is then flushed to ensure that it is free flowing. The watery, sticky eyes usually resolve within a week of the operation.

What to expect in hospital

On arrival, you and your child will be greeted by your nurse and shown to your bed area. You will be seen by an anaesthetist (the doctor who puts your child to sleep) and your surgeon prior to the operation. They will check your child is well and confirm that the operation is still necessary. You will be asked to sign a consent form where the risks and benefits of the operation will be fully explained.

After the operation

Following the anaesthetic, it is likely that your child will feel tired and possibly tearful - this is due to the anaesthetic. They may have a drink on returning to the ward and will then be encouraged to rest. The nurse looking after you will be assessing your child regularly and will let you know when it is safe for them to eat.

There should be very little discomfort but if your child experiences any pain, please tell the nurse looking after you and painkillers will be given. The nurse looking after you will also be regularly assessing your child's eyes for any sign of bleeding, bruising or swelling.

Risks and complications

Syringing and probing is a very safe procedure but occasional nose bleeds can occur for up to 3 days following surgery. More complicated obstructions might require further surgery which, if occurs, your surgeon will discuss with you before discharge.

Care at home

Eye care

Your child's eye may continue to be a little sticky for up to a week following the operation. When cleaning the eye, please use the following guidelines:

- Use a clean facecloth or tissues. **Avoid cotton wool** as it can leave behind fibres which may irritate the eye.
- Bathe the area around the eye with cooled boiled water using gentle sweeping movements. Start from the inside of the eye (by the nose) and move to the outside (towards the ear).
- If there is hardened discharge (crust) on your child's eyelid or lashes, apply a facecloth warmed with warm water to the closed eyelid for a few minutes.
- Use a clean facecloth every time you clean the eye.

Eating and drinking

Your child may eat and drink normally.

Nausea and vomiting

Do not worry if your child feels sick or vomits once or twice after leaving hospital. The anaesthetic can cause this and it is not an uncommon side effect. If this occurs stop giving food for about an hour and try small amounts of water or diluted juice every 20 minutes, then try a light diet such as plain biscuits or toast. If your child continues to vomit, please call for advice or attend your GP or nearest Emergency Department.

Activity

Your child should be well enough to resume their normal routine, including swimming, 24 hours after the operation.

Follow-up

You may be asked to attend a follow-up appointment up to 3 months after the operation to discuss the results of surgery, recovery and any additional treatment your child may require. This appointment will be sent to you by post.

Useful contact details

East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk
- Telephone 01438 314333

Bluebell Ward, Lister Hospital:

- Telephone 01438 284008

Children's Day Surgery, Level 4, Lister Hospital:

- Telephone 01438 285775

Children's Emergency Department, Lister Hospital:

- Telephone 01438 284333

Urgent Care Centre, New QEII Hospital, Welwyn Garden City:

- Telephone 01707 247549

Eye Casualty Department, Treatment Centre, Lister Hospital:

- Telephone 01438 288117
Monday to Friday, 9am - 7pm
Saturday, 9am - 12 noon.

Ophthalmology Hub, Treatment Centre, Lister Hospital:

- Telephone 01438 286222

Leaflet information

**You can request this information in a different format or another language;
please speak to your doctor or nurse.**

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