

Squint surgery

information for parents and guardians



What is a squint?

A squint is a misalignment of the two eyes. An eye may turn inwards or turn outwards. Occasionally one eye may be higher or lower than the other (vertical squint). The squint may be constant (there all the time) or intermittent (only there some of the time).

Aim of squint surgery?

In the majority of cases the aim of squint surgery is to improve the appearance of the squint. In most cases if you child wears glasses they will still do so after surgery. The surgery will be based on the squint position with their glasses on. More than one operation may be needed in order to achieve the desired result.

Less commonly, an operation may be performed to straighten the eye so that they may once again work as a pair and allow binocular function (3D vision).

What happens during surgery?

The operation involves surgery to the muscles that either move the eye from side to side or up and down. These muscles are attached to the sclera (white outer coat of the eye) but are hidden from view by conjunctiva (a thin layer of covering skin).

The operation may be performed on one or both eyes and may involve moving one, two or more muscles. Sometimes it's necessary to perform surgery on the eye that seems straight to get the best result. The surgeon and/or orthoptist will explain the surgical plan to you before the operation.

During the operation the muscles are moved by a specific amount determined by the measurements previously taken by the orthoptist. The muscles are sewn into place using an dissolvable stitch.

It should be noted that the eye is not taken out during surgery.

Links to resources that may help prepare your child for surgery

The following links provide helpful videos detailing the different aspects of squint surgery including the anaesthetic, the procedure and recovery. You can watch the videos from these links and choose if you'd like your child to watch them or not.

Generalised information regarding squint surgery across the UK.
http://www.squintclinic.com/videos/squint_surgery/day_of_surgery/child_surgery/

A video specific to squint surgery in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast where the surgery is performed.

<https://belfasttrust.hscni.net/service/childrens-eye-services/>

Rees Bear has an anaesthetic social story video, produced by Royal College of Anaesthetists.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=va8pDyIZSkA&t=15s>

Rees Bear has an anaesthetic social story, produced by Royal College of Anaesthetists.

<https://rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2023-04/ReesBear2023web.pdf>

Before the operation

A pre-assessment is performed in the weeks leading up to the operation. At this assessment the orthoptist will take up-to-date measurements of your child's squint to ensure the correct amount of surgery is performed.

The surgery cannot go ahead without these final measurements. Any glasses currently worn whether part-time or full-time should be brought to this pre-assessment.

How long will my child be in hospital?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic. It normally takes between 30-90 minutes, depending on how much surgery is being performed. However, your child will be in the theatre department for longer as they will spend time in recovery until they have fully woken up from the anaesthetic.

Your child will come into hospital as a day case but you should prepare for an overnight stay as, occasionally, children can be sick after the general anaesthesia.

Will the surgery cure my child's squint?

The squint might not be completely corrected by the operation and more than one surgery may be needed, however about 90% of patients will notice an improvement in their squint following surgery.

Although your child's eye alignment may have improved following surgery, some require further surgery in the future, due to recurrence of the squint over time. We won't be able to predict when or if this will occur.

Will my child still need glasses after surgery?

If your child currently wears glasses, these will still need to be worn following surgery, unless advised otherwise by your orthoptist.

Squint surgery will not improve your child's vision, just the position and/or control of their eyes.

After the operation

Operated eye(s) will be quite red for 2-3 weeks but will gradually return to normal with some grittiness/soreness lasting a few days.

Your child will require drops a number of times each day for a few weeks following surgery. Specific guidance will be given after your surgery.

The eye can be cleaned to remove any stickiness using cotton wool moistened with cooled, boiled water, wiping from the inner corner of the eye to the outer corner.

Painkillers can be given if your child's eyes are painful as advised by your doctor.

Discourage your child from touching/rubbing their eyes.

It is advised to keep your child out of nursery/school for a few days after the operation. Specific guidance on how many days will be given after your surgery.

It is also advisable to avoid swimming, playing contact sport and playing in a dusty environment for 3-4 weeks after the operation to avoid infection.

We will aim for your child to be reviewed by the ophthalmologist and orthoptist at 1-2 weeks post operation and again at 6 months.

Further follow up appointments will still be required with your orthoptist after the operation to monitor:

- Changes to the control/size of the squint
- Your child's vision, to determine if patching treatment is required
- Your child's glasses wear.

Risks/complications of surgery

As with all operations, squint surgery is not without risks, outlined below:

- **Diplopia (Double vision)** - almost always temporary but can be corrected with further treatment if persists
- **Over correction of squint** – the squint may change direction e.g. a previously inward turning eye can occasionally turn outwards post-surgery, but can often settle without further treatment
- **Slipped muscle** – occurs in <1% of squint operations in which the eye may be in a good position after surgery but suddenly worsens in the days following surgery due to the muscle slipping from its new position.

What to do if you have a concern after the operation

If your child's eye becomes very red and painful or if he/she complains of a sudden or marked deterioration in the vision please seek immediate advice by contacting:

- **The Regional Acute Eye Service at 028 9063 3288** (9am - 5pm) or
- **Wards 28/31 at 028 9063 2392 / 028 9063 3344** (5pm - 9am) and ask to speak to the senior nurse.

If you have any questions which are not answered in this leaflet, please do not hesitate to ask the staff in the Eye Department who will be happy to try and answer them for you.