Having a varicocele embolisation

A varicocele is an abnormality in the veins that take blood away from the testicle. The veins become bigger and more obvious like varicose veins in the leg. Varicoceles can cause problems including infertility, unsightly swelling and a dragging pain.

In the past, an open operation would have been needed to get rid of the varicocele, but now it can be treated by a less invasive procedure performed under x-ray guidance.

Known as embolisation, the procedure is a way of blocking these veins, making them less obvious and causing the varicocele to disappear.

Risks of procedure
The risk of bleeding is minimal. There may occasionally be a small bruise where the needle has been inserted and this is quite normal. If this becomes a large bruise, there is a risk of infection and antibiotic treatment will be required.

Very rarely, the catheter can cause some damage to the vein and this may need surgery or another radiological procedure.

Despite these possible complications, the procedure is safe and carried out without significant effects. Radiation exposure will be kept at a safe level based on clinical need.

Before the procedure
Usually, no special preparation is needed. On the day of your procedure, you should have a light breakfast before 7am and take your normal medication.

Please have a shower or bath and shave the right side of your groin.

You are asked to call the telephone number on this leaflet to inform nursing staff if you are taking warfarin or any other blood-thinning medication.

It is also important that you let us know if you have any allergies.

On arrival
You will be asked to change into a hospital gown but may also bring a dressing gown with you if you wish to.

The radiologist will explain details of the procedure, answer any questions you may have and ask you to sign a consent form. It is important you understand what you are agreeing to before signing the form. Please do not hesitate to ask for more information if you feel you need it.
During the procedure
The procedure is performed in a surgical area in sterile conditions.

The radiologist will give you an injection of local anaesthetic in the groin and, once the area is numb, will insert a needle into a large vein.

A wire followed by a soft narrow tube called a catheter is then inserted.

When the catheter is in the correct position, a clear liquid which makes the area visible is injected into the catheter.

When the radiologist is satisfied he is in the correct position, coils and special liquid are used to stop the blood flow.

The procedure should take between 30 minutes and an hour.

After the procedure
You will be taken to the radiology day unit for your recovery, which will take around three to four hours. A nurse will measure your blood pressure, pulse and check the puncture site regularly to make sure you are not bleeding.

Please make arrangements to be collected by a relative or friend when discharged from the hospital as you should not drive for 24 hours after the procedure.

The nurse will inform you of a follow-up appointment if one is needed.

You should rest for the remainder of the day at home and resume normal activities after 24 hours. If you experience pain or discomfort, take everyday painkillers, like paracetamol.

Bleeding from the puncture site is rare but, if there is any, press on the wound for about ten to 20 minutes and it should stop. If you are worried, please contact your GP or visit the nearest emergency department.

Radiology day unit
Main x-ray
C level
Southampton General Hospital
Tremona Road
Southampton
SO16 6YD

Telephone: 023 8079 8576

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

For a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688.