

Patient information factsheet

Electrolysis treatment for ingrowing eyelashes

We have given you this factsheet because you have been referred for a procedure called electrolysis to treat ingrowing eyelashes. It explains what electrolysis is and what the procedure involves so you know what to expect. We hope it helps to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

What is an ingrowing eyelash?

An ingrowing eyelash (medically known as trichiasis) is when an eyelash (or several eyelashes) grows inwards or in the wrong direction. It can cause your eyelashes to rub against the front of your eye, causing pain and irritation.

What causes ingrowing eyelashes?

Ingrowing eyelashes can be caused by:

- inflammatory eye conditions that change the direction in which the eyelashes grow
- injury or previous surgery to the eyelid

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of ingrowing eyelashes include:

- red, sore and watery eyes
- a sensation that something is in the eye
- blurred vision
- light sensitivity (if any of the eyelashes are scratching the eye)

If left untreated, ingrowing eyelashes can cause ulcers, infection or even permanent damage to your sight.

How are ingrowing eyelashes treated?

Ingrowing eyelashes can be treated in a variety of ways depending on how many eyelashes are affected and the location where they are growing.

Treatment can include:

- epilation (plucking the eyelashes)
- electrolysis
- surgery

Your doctor will review your condition and advise which treatment option is best for you.

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What is electrolysis?

Electrolysis is a surgical procedure designed to stop ingrowing eyelashes from regrowing by destroying the eyelash follicle.

The procedure is performed under local anaesthetic (numbing medication) and involves inserting a fine probe into the root of the eyelash and then passing an electrical current through the probe. It is usually done as a day case which means you can return home soon after having the procedure.

Why have I been referred for electrolysis?

Although epilation (plucking your eyelashes) is the simplest way to remove ingrowing eyelashes, it is not a permanent solution. Eyelashes, like all hairs, regrow roughly every couple of months so epilation would need to be performed regularly. Electrolysis is a more permanent solution as it destroys the eyelash follicle, stopping the eyelash from regrowing.

How successful is electrolysis?

Most people will need to have more than one electrolysis treatment to permanently remove their ingrowing eyelashes. This is because half of all the eyelashes treated with electrolysis are likely to regrow. We will explain this to you in more detail before your procedure.

Who can have electrolysis?

Electrolysis is **not** suitable for everyone.

Electrolysis is only a suitable treatment option if you:

- have a small number of ingrowing eyelashes (if you have a significant number of ingrowing eyelashes, your doctor will discuss alternative treatment options with you)
- have visible eyelashes (if you have recently plucked your eyelashes, we will schedule an electrolysis treatment for when most of your eyelashes have grown back)
- are fit enough for a minor procedure and are able to lie flat
- do not have an implanted electrical device (for example, a pacemaker, defibrillator or cochlear implant)

Contact our eye unit as soon as possible using the contact details on page 5 if you:

- have an implanted electrical device (such as a pacemaker, defibrillator or cochlear implant)
- are pregnant
- are breastfeeding
- have an infection or inflammation (swelling) on or around your eye

If any of the above apply to you, we may need to cancel or postpone your procedure. We will discuss this with you in more detail, if applicable.

Are there any risks or side effects?

Electrolysis is generally a safe procedure, but as with any surgery, there are some possible risks and side effects.

Side effects may include:

- bruising and swelling (after your procedure, we may place a dressing over your eye to help with this. You will need to keep this dressing on for a few hours or in some cases for one day.)
- discomfort (over-the-counter pain relief medication such as paracetamol can help with this. Always follow the instructions included with the medication.)

Risks may include:

- infection (the risk of this is small and we will give you an antibiotic ointment to use for approximately 10 days after your procedure to help reduce your risk)
- scarring (the treated area of your eyelid may look bare, pale and slightly irregular as it will have no eyelashes)
- eyelash recurrence (in up to 50% of cases the eyelashes will regrow, needing additional electrolysis treatment)

Important information

To perform electrolysis, we require the use of small probes. The probes that are currently available to use for this treatment do not have a CE marking (a certification mark indicating a product meets health, safety, and environmental requirements for the European market). However, they are commonly used by numerous care providers in the UK, including our local regional hospitals, with good outcomes. To our knowledge, no safety concerns have been identified with these probes.

How should I prepare for the procedure?

Eating and drinking

You can continue to eat and drink as normal on the day of your procedure.

Medication

You should continue to take all your usual medications (including blood-thinning medications) as normal on the day of your procedure unless advised otherwise by a healthcare professional.

Transport

You will not be able to drive yourself home after your procedure. Please arrange for someone to collect you and take you home from the hospital.

What will happen during the procedure?

The procedure will be performed in an outpatient treatment room by a doctor.

We will ask you to lie flat on your back on a trolley or bed. We will then put numbing eyedrops into your eye(s). These drops will usually sting for a few seconds before going numb. We will then clean your eyelid(s) with an antiseptic solution.

After we have cleaned your eyelid(s), we will inject some local anaesthetic to numb the area. Please note that you will still be able to feel some touch and/or pressure around your eye(s), but you should not feel any pain. We will check that the area around your eye(s) is numb before starting the procedure.

To help us see your eyelashes clearly, we will need to use a microscope that has a bright light attached to it. Please be aware that this light may shine into your eyes. It is important that you lie still and keep your eyes open throughout the procedure. If you have any concerns or experience any discomfort, please let us know.

We will then insert a fine probe into your eyelash root and pass an electrical current through it to destroy the eyelash follicle. We will repeat this process for each individual affected eyelash.

How long will the procedure take?

The procedure usually takes between 30 and 40 minutes depending on the number of eyelashes needing treatment.

What will happen after the procedure?

Electrolysis is usually performed under local anaesthetic. This means that you can go home on the same day as your procedure and will not need monitoring overnight. However, in some exceptional cases, sedation (a medication that makes you drowsy) or a general anaesthetic (a medication that sends you to sleep) may be needed. If this is the case, you will still be able to go home on the same day as your procedure, but you will need someone to stay with you overnight for monitoring. We will discuss this with you in advance.

You will not be able to drive yourself home after your procedure as your vision will be temporarily affected. Please ensure you have arranged for someone to collect you and take you home from the hospital.

Before you leave hospital, we will prescribe you an antibiotic ointment to use for up to 10 days after your procedure. Please follow the instructions we have given you carefully. Please note that the antibiotic ointment is greasy and can cause blurring of vision. **You should avoid driving if this occurs.**

For **two weeks** after your procedure, you should avoid:

- swimming
- wearing contact lenses
- any activities that may increase the risk of infection (for example, DIY and gardening)

For more information about what to expect after your procedure, please read the separate 'After your eyelid surgery' factsheet we have given you.

When should I seek urgent medical help?

Contact our eye emergency department triage line immediately using the contact details on page 5 if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- severe pain in the treated eye(s)
- sudden vision changes in the treated eye(s)
- increased swelling, redness or warmth around the treated eye(s) or discharge from the treated eye(s) (these are signs of an infection)

What follow-up care will I receive?

We will arrange a follow-up clinic appointment for you approximately six to eight weeks after your procedure. Please see your appointment letter for more details.

During this appointment, we will check to see if your eyelashes have regrown and will plan any further treatment(s), if necessary. If you have any concerns before your follow-up appointment, please contact our eye unit or our eye short stay unit (eye ward) using the contact details on page 5.

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Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us using the relevant details below.

Non-urgent queries

Eye unit

Telephone: **023 8120 5073** or **023 8120 1429** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5.30pm)

Email: nonurgenteyeunit@uhs.nhs.uk

Eye short stay unit (eye ward)

Telephone: **023 8120 8600** (24-hour line)

Please note that staffing levels overnight will be reduced.

Urgent queries

Eye emergency department triage line

Telephone: **023 8120 6592** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 7.30pm and weekends and bank holidays, 8am to 6pm)

If you have any concerns outside of these hours, go to your nearest emergency department.

Useful links

www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Eyes/After-your-eyelid-surgery-2090-PIL.pdf

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **PFSH@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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