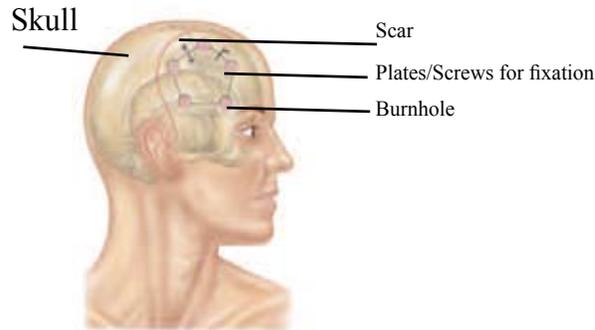


What is a Craniotomy?

This is a type of surgery where a piece of bone has been removed from the skull to gain access to the brain.

The word craniotomy means- making a hole (otomy) in the skull-(cranium).

It is carried out by Neurosurgeons who specialise in surgery of the brain and spine.



Why do I need a Craniotomy?

A craniotomy is necessary to deal surgically with a number of abnormalities of the brain and its surrounding structures. For example blood clots, brain haemorrhage or tumours.

What happens before the operation?

The doctor will discuss the reasons why you require the surgery with you or your family if you are too unwell. The doctor will explain the risks of surgery and ask you to sign a consent form to state that you understand the procedure and the risks involved. Your next of kin may have to sign the consent on your behalf if you are unable to do so.

What happens during the operation?

The operation is usually carried out under a general anaesthetic. You will therefore be asleep and will not feel anything during the surgery. In some

cases the neurosurgeon may operate under a local anaesthetic. The operation requires a section of hair to be shaved. The incision may vary depending on the type of operation. Usually it is a curving incision placed behind the hairline.

To gain access to the brain a section of the skull bone (bone flap) is temporarily removed. After the abnormality had been removed the bone flap is usually replaced and secured in place with titanium plates and clips. The incision is then closed with stitches or clips (staples). The length of the operation can vary depending on the case.

What happens after the operation?

Once the operation is over you will be woken up and monitored closely in the recovery area. Once your condition is stable you will be transferred to the ward. You may be looked after in the high dependency area or if you require intensive monitoring you may be transferred to the Intensive Care Unit. Some people may require to be kept asleep on a ventilator (breathing machine) for a while after the operation.

You will have a drip and receive some fluids into your veins until you are able to drink on your own. Sometimes a catheter (tube) may be placed into the bladder to help you pass urine. All of these tubes will be removed as your condition starts to improve.

What are the risks and complications of surgery?

- After surgery there is a small risk of developing seizures or fits.
- Occasionally a clot can form at the site of the operation and may require a second operation to remove it.
- There is also risk of neurological deficits such as weakness, clumsiness, speech problems etc. The neurosurgical team will discuss the risks with you and your family

prior to surgery. Generally these deficits can improve but recovery can vary and depend on the amount of injury to the brain. If you had any significant problems prior to surgery they may take longer to recover.

- During the craniotomy operation a small cut is made to the muscle that helps with chewing. You may find that the jaw feels stiff and have difficulty chewing. Chewing gum can help the muscle to recover and this problem usually clears up after a couple of months.
- In many cases people experience swelling and bruising around the eyes after surgery. This is nothing to worry about and it usually settles within a few days.

Will I be tired?

In the early stages after surgery it is expected that you will be very tired. In the first few weeks you may notice that you are sleeping more than normal and get fatigued from doing even simple tasks such as taking a bath. Simply concentrating on something or having a conversation can be as tiring as a physical activity. The brain requires a lot of rest to help it recover.

Will I get headaches?

Headaches are not unusual following surgery. The frequency and severity of headaches should reduce over time. It is okay to take regular painkillers such as Paracetamol or Neurofen to help treat headaches. You may notice that headaches are associated with tiredness or following periods of concentration for example. If you find that your headaches are becoming more frequent or more severe you should contact the Nurse specialist or your GP.

What about the wound?

You may feel some pain at the early stages of recovery as the wound starts to heal. You should discuss pain relief with the nurse taking care of you. There may be swelling around the wound site but this usually disappears after a few days. The stitches / clips are usually removed 5-10 days after surgery. In some cases there may be dissolvable sutures which do not need to be removed.

Some nerves have been cut during the operation and this may cause some numbness around the wound site. This numbness can sometimes be unpleasant or painful. After a while sensation starts to return to the wound site and you may experience a pins and needles sensation to the area around the wound and it may start to feel itchy. This is a sign that the wound is starting to heal. It is important that you avoid itching or scratching the wound and surrounding area in order to prevent infection in the wound site.

You may notice that there is some fluid around the wound site and wound may appear slightly red and swollen after surgery... this is normal. It can appear fuller in the morning and reduce as the days goes on. This usually resolves although the area around the wound can be soft and “spongy” for some time after. If you notice that the wound looks larger or redder or if there is any discharge or ooze from the wound you should contact your doctor or GP.

Your hair can be washed once the wound is closed and sutures are removed. A non-perfumed shampoo is recommended. Be sure to rub gently around the scalp as it will be very tender. The hair will grow back around the wound and the scar is only noticeable if it is beyond the hairline or if you have no hair.

Often people are concerned that they will set off the alarms at the airport due to the presence of the

clips and plates in their head. They do not usually interfere with the equipment.

How long will it take me to recover?

It is not possible to predict how long it will take or to what extent someone will recover. Recovery depends on the type of injury and the amount of brain injury that has occurred as a result. If you have been transferred from another hospital to Beaumont for treatment you may be transferred back, once stable, to that same hospital while you recover before you return home.

Other publications about **Types of Brain Injury, Recovering after Brain Injury and Seizures and Brain Injury** are also available from the Neuroscience Department in Beaumont Hospital.

This leaflet was developed in order to provide you with information on your condition. Whilst you are in hospital, you will be reviewed regularly by your doctors. If you have any questions, we encourage you to speak to a member of the nursing staff or your doctor.

Contact Details

Beaumont Hospital Tel: 01 8093000
Acquired Brain Injury Nurse Tel: 01 8092913

Further information and advice is available from:

Headway Ireland

The National Acquired Brain Injury Association

National Helpline: 1890 200 278

Email: info@headwayireland.ie

Website: www.headwayireland.ie

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Beaumont Hospital
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Patient Information
on
Craniotomy