

If In Doubt – Check It Out

Your guide to post-operative complications

After surgery it is normal to feel fatigued, alongside having swelling, bruising, aches and pains. However, there are some complications after surgery that requires urgent medical attention. Remember that procedures, medications and advice given during and after surgery are used to reduce the risk of complication, but if any of the below symptoms occur, it is best to err on the side of caution and get yourself checked out.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

A DVT is a blood clot that forms in a vein, typically in the calf but can occur elsewhere. If you experience one or more of the below symptoms, particularly in your operated limb you should seek urgent medical attention via A&E:

- A new onset of red, discoloured or shiny skin, in your operated limb e.g lower leg or arm
- A sudden increase in the temperature of your skin in your operated limb e.g your calf is much hotter than your thigh
- A new onset of swelling that is firm and painful to touch
- A sudden increase in pain without reason meaning you are unable to put weight through the affected limb (increased activity could be an expected reason for some increase in pain)

Remember, some swelling, redness and slight increase in temperature around your wound site is normal, however if you are concerned– seek immediate medical advice.

Pulmonary Embolism (PE)

A PE occurs when a blood clot travels into your lungs, reducing the supply of oxygen you receive. If any of the below symptoms occur, seek immediate medical attention via A&E:

- New onset of shortness of breath
- Chest pain or tightness

Stroke

A stroke can occur when the oxygen supply to the brain is impaired. A DVT or a PE could lead to a stroke. If you develop one or more of the below symptoms, seek immediate medical attention via A&E:

- New inability to raise your arms and keep them there
- Drooping of one side of the face
- Slurred speech
- Loss of consciousness



Infection

If you develop an infection in your wound, it will need to be assessed and you may require antibiotics. Symptoms can be similar to a DVT but are typically more local to the wound site. If you develop one or more of the below symptoms, seek an urgent GP appointment in the first instance. However, if your symptoms worsen or you develop symptoms that are not local to the operation, seek immediately medical attention via A&E:

- Sudden increase in temperature, swelling and redness around wound site
- Sudden increase in pain at the wound site
- Wound is oozing pus or fluid that is not clear and is not blood (it may also smell unpleasant)
- Wound is opening up more
- Fever
- Feeling generally unwell

Dislocation

After certain surgeries (usually joint replacements) there is a possibility that your new prosthesis can move position. If you develop the below symptoms you should either attend your local walk-in-centre or A&E:

- A slip, trip or fall resulting in increased pain around the operation site with or without the joint feeling unstable
- Sudden loss of movement within the new joint
- A change in position or appearance of the joint, particularly after a new slip trip or fall.

Heart Attack

Typical signs of a heart attack are listed below. This is an emergency and would require immediate medical attention via A&E:

- Sudden onset of chest pain with or without pain down left arm, jaw pain, sometimes with persistent pins and needles in your hands
- New onset of shortness of breath

Cauda Equina Syndrome

If you have had spinal surgery, please refer to information on the cauda equina syndrome symptom card.

Remember, if you're not sure if you should attend A&E, call 111 for further advice.



Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net. If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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