

What is a Craniotomy ?

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

What are the common reasons for having a Craniotomy ?

There are lots of different types of reasons for example:

To Remove:	Brain tumours	Meningioma Glioma/Glioblastoma Cerebral Metastasis
	Cerebral haemorrhages (blood clots) Drain infection Vascular Lesions	Arteriovenous malformations Cavernous Haemangiomas
To Repair:	Cerebral Aneurysms Arteriovenous Fistulae	
To Biopsy:	Suspected Tumours	

Is this done under a general anaesthetic ?

In most cases Yes. Sometimes if a lesion is being removed from a very important part of the brain it may be done under local. I can be done this way as the brain itself does not feel any pain.

How long does a typical operation take ?

Usually in the order of 2 hours operating time. It can take up to 12 hours in some cases.

Is there a problem with long anaesthetic ?

Not usually.

Will I loose all my hair ?

Some surgeons will shave the whole head but this is uncommon. Most will only shave the area of concern. A few surgeons will not shave at all.

Where will the cut on my head be ?

Ask your surgeon. It is normally directly over the place the surgeon wants to get to.

How much will it hurt ?

The incision will not hurt much at all. You commonly have a headache after the procedure which can be moderately severe in only a few patients. The type of procedure inside the head will dictate the amount of headache. Ask your surgeon.

What happens to the bone that is removed ?

This is normally replaced and held in with clips or plates.

How much risk am I at from the hole in my head immediately after the surgery ?

If the bone is replaced, very little as, it protects the brain and it would take a significant knock to dislodge it. If the bone is not replaced for any reason then the risk is still small. If you think about it you do not bump your head that often.

Will my hair grow back ?

Yes! You may find that there will less growth over the scar

Will my scar be visible ?

Most scars are behind the hairline but some will be visible (especially if you have no hair).

What are the general complications in a craniotomy ?

The risks depend on the size of the procedure and the reason for it.

The common risks are:

From the Anaesthetic	
Infection	In the Skin / Bone / Brain
Seizure	
Postoperative blood clot	
Neurological deficit e.g. weakness / clumsy / loss of speech / visual change etc.	

What is the chance I will loose all my memory ?

This is unusual and depends on the location of the brain that the surgeon is operating on. Memory is mostly in the temporal lobe and in some areas in the frontal lobe. If the surgeon is not in that region the risk would be small.

What is the chance i will end up in a coma ?

This is unusual and depends on the location of the brain that the surgeon is operating on. Consciousness is mostly in the brainstem. If your surgeon is operating there the risk is there. If the surgeon is not in that region the risk would be small. If a large amount of brain is damaged for some reason you will also end up in a coma

What is the chance I will be a different person (loose my personality) ?

Again this is unlikely and depends on the location of the brain that the surgeon is operating on. This is mostly in the dominant (Left) frontal lobe and in some areas in the temporal lobe. If the surgeon is not in that region the risk would be small.

Will I be able to recognise my family ?

Most Neurosurgery is uncomplicated and it would only be if you had one of the three complications above that this may be an issue.

Will I be confused post-operatively ?

Some elderly patients are quite confused after surgery (any surgery not just neurosurgery) this usually settles with time. You may say or do some things that you may be embarrassed by when you get better. Do not worry as the staff looking after you are used to this.

How is the piece of bone removed ?

One or two small holes are drilled and these joined up with a special drill.

How is it held back in place ?

Most surgeons use titanium plates or clips to hold the bone in place.

What is a PTERYONAL craniotomy ?

This is the type used to get access to that area of the brain just behind the eye. This is to get to things like the nerves to the eye, the pituitary gland, and the main arteries to the brain.

Does the bone heal back into the skull ?

In most cases yes but in some people it can re-absorb to a degree and then you will have a depression in your skull ?

How much brain can be removed ?

We try not to remove any at all. There are some parts of the brain that you can do without such as some of the right frontal lobe and the right temporal lobe.

What is a normal surgical out of pocket cost ?

Most surgeons do not charge out of pocket to patients with cancer. For non cancer surgery you should discuss this with your surgeon. It will probably be in the order of \$800.

Is the more expensive surgeon better ?

As in all things different people charge different amounts. Some excellent surgeons may only charge the no gap fee. Other very junior inexperienced surgeons may charge enormous out of pocket fees. There is no doubt that for some procedures where the amount allowed by medicare is small that there should be a significant out of pocket fee. You should judge your surgeon on experience and results and not how much they charge.

Why is there an out of pocket cost ?

The government when they brought in medicare costed surgical procedures at a reasonable fee structure. The raising of these fees has not kept up with the CPI or cost of living. In real terms they are a long way behind the current needed fee structure. The figure that they have set is the rebate. Anything above that you have to pay.

Are there a list of questions should ask my surgeon ?

Yes go to [WHAT TO ASK YOUR SURGEON](#)