

Fat Necrosis

Information for patients

What is fat necrosis?

Fat necrosis is a benign (non-cancerous) condition where fat cells in your body have been damaged or have died. When fat cells are injured, they can form a firm lump or area of thickening that may feel concerning, but it is not cancer and does not increase your risk of developing cancer.

What causes fat necrosis?

Fat necrosis typically occurs as a result of:

- **Trauma or injury** to the area (this may be minor and you might not remember it)
- **Previous surgery** in the area
- **Medical procedures** such as injections or biopsies
- **Radiotherapy treatment**
- **Infections** affecting the fat tissue
- Sometimes **no obvious cause** can be identified

What are the symptoms?

Fat necrosis may present as:

- A firm, sometimes hard lump under the skin
- An area that feels different from the surrounding tissue
- Occasionally some tenderness or discomfort
- The overlying skin may appear normal or slightly discoloured
- The lump usually doesn't move much when pressed

The area may remain the same size or gradually change over time.

How is fat necrosis diagnosed?

Your doctor has arranged imaging studies (such as ultrasound, MRI, or CT scan) to examine the area. These scans help to:

- Identify the characteristic appearance of fat necrosis
- Distinguish it from other types of lumps
- Determine the size and extent of the affected area

The imaging findings show features typical of fat necrosis, which helps confirm the diagnosis.

Do I need treatment?

In most cases, fat necrosis does not require any specific treatment. The condition is:

- **Completely benign** (not cancerous)
- **Not harmful** to your health
- **Does not spread** to other parts of the body
- **Does not increase cancer risk**

What can I expect?

Fat necrosis may:

- **Stay the same** - many areas of fat necrosis remain stable over time
- **Gradually improve** - some areas may soften or reduce in size
- **Form scar tissue** - the area may become firmer as it heals
- **Develop calcification** - calcium deposits may form, which is normal and harmless

When might treatment be considered?

Treatment is rarely needed but may be discussed if:

- The area is causing significant discomfort
- The lump is very large and affecting daily activities
- There is uncertainty about the diagnosis

Treatment options, if needed, may include surgical removal, but this is very uncommon.

Follow-up and monitoring

Routine follow-up is usually not necessary for fat necrosis. However, you should:

- Be aware of how the area feels normally
- Contact your GP if you notice significant changes
- Report any new lumps elsewhere

When should I seek medical advice?

Contact your GP if you notice:

- **Rapid growth** of the existing area
- **New lumps** anywhere on your body
- **Significant pain** or discomfort in the area
- **Skin changes** such as redness, warmth, or discharge
- **Any concerns** about changes in the area

Key points to remember

- Fat necrosis is **completely benign** and not cancer
- It **does not increase** your risk of developing cancer
- **No treatment** is usually needed
- The area may **stay the same or gradually change** over time
- It's **safe to continue** normal activities

- **New lumps** anywhere should always be checked by your doctor

Frequently asked questions

Q: Will the fat necrosis go away completely?

A: Some areas improve over time, while others remain stable. This varies from person to person.

Q: Can fat necrosis turn into cancer?

A: No, fat necrosis cannot turn into cancer and does not increase your cancer risk.

Q: Should I avoid certain activities?

A: No, you can continue with all your normal activities unless specifically advised otherwise.

Q: Do I need regular scans?

A: Routine follow-up scans are not necessary for fat necrosis.

Q: What about future injuries to the same area?

A: Further injury could potentially cause additional fat necrosis, but this doesn't make the condition more serious.

Q: Is fat necrosis common?

A: Yes, fat necrosis is relatively common, particularly following trauma, surgery, or radiotherapy to an area.

Contact information

If you have any concerns or questions, please contact:

- Your GP in the first instance
- The Bone and Sarcoma Service if specifically advised to do so.

This leaflet provides general information only. Always follow the specific advice given by your healthcare team.