



Lymph Node Dissection: Axilla and Groin

*What to expect and how to prepare for
your operation*

Your doctor recommends you have *lymph node dissection*, surgery to remove some or all of your lymph nodes. This operation gives your doctors a better look at the extent of your cancer and helps them decide the best treatment plan for you. This handout will help you prepare for your operation and your recovery.

How to Prepare for Your Operation

Things to Remember

- **Aspirin and other medicines:** Do **not** take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting for 1 week before your operation. Two of these are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naprosyn (Aleve, Naproxen). See attached sheet for more information.
- **Shaving:** Do **not** shave any part of your body that you do not already shave every day. If you normally shave near your surgical site, do **not** shave that area for 2 days (48 hours) before your surgery.
- **Hospital stay:** You may stay in the hospital 1 or 2 days to recover.
- **Going home:** You will need an adult to drive you home after your operation. You cannot drive yourself or take a taxi or bus home alone from the hospital.
- **Help at home:** If you go home the same day as your surgery, an adult must stay with you the first night.

24 Hours Before Your Operation

- **Take 2 showers:** Take 1 shower the night before, and a second shower the morning of your operation. Use the antibacterial soap your nurse gave you to wash your body.

Do **not** use the antibacterial soap on your face and hair. (See directions that came with the soap.) Use your own soap and shampoo on your face and hair. Use clean towels to dry off, and put on clean clothing.

Remember:

Do not take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting for 1 week before your operation.

- **Arrival time:** The pre-surgery nurse will call you by 5 p.m. the night before your operation. If you are having surgery on a Monday, the nurse will call you the Friday before. If you do not hear from the pre-surgery nurse by 5 p.m., please call 206-598-6334.

The pre-surgery nurse will tell you when to come to the hospital and will remind you:

- Not to eat or drink after a certain time.
 - Which of your regular medicines to take or not take.
 - To sip only enough water to swallow your pills.
- **Heating blanket:** To reduce your risk of infection, you will be covered with a heating blanket to warm your body while you wait to go into the operating room. Ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.

What to Expect After Surgery

Precautions and Self-care to Speed Your Recovery

Medicine given to you during and after your operation will affect you. For 24 hours after your surgery, do **not**:

- Drive or travel alone.
- Use machinery.
- Drink alcohol.
- Sign any legal papers.
- Be responsible for the care of another person.

Incision and Dressing Care

Your incision will be closed with stitches that dissolve over time. A *dressing* (bandage) will cover your incision. Before you leave the hospital, you will be given instructions and supplies for changing your dressing.

After the outer dressing is removed, you must check your incision every day for signs of infection. These signs are listed on the last page of this handout. If you cannot see your incision, ask a family member or a friend to check it for you.

Drain

You may have a plastic drain tube placed next to your incision to help remove fluid that normally collects after this surgery. Before you go home, your nurse will show you how to:

- Measure the drainage and record the amount.
- Change the drain dressing every 24 hours or when it becomes damp or soiled with drainage.
- Strip the drain tubing every 8 hours to help the drainage flow properly.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call the Surgical Specialties Nurse Advice Line at 206-598-4549.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the resident on call for Surgery to be paged.

Or, ask for your surgeon to be paged:

Dr. _____

Your drain will be removed when the amount of drainage is 30 cc (1 oz.) or less in 24 hours. Call the Nurse Advice Line at 206-598-4549 to schedule a visit to have it removed.

If you have increasing fullness under your skin in the area of your drain after it is removed, call the Nurse Advice Line.

Pain Management

Take your medicine as instructed. Please read the information you received about constipation after your operation.

Regular Medicines

Start taking your regular medicines as instructed except for aspirin, or aspirin-like products. You can take aspirin or aspirin-like medicines starting 2 days after your operation.

Exercises

If you have had an axillary node dissection, we will give you stretching exercises to do after your drain is removed. These exercises will help loosen your shoulder muscles and keep your shoulder working right.

Results

It takes at least 5 weekdays to receive final results from your lymph node dissection. We will call you when we receive your results.

Return to Work

Talk with your surgeon about when you will be able to return to work.

Call the Nurse Advice Line or Your Doctor If You Have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing.
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C).
- Shaking and chills.
- Any sign of infection in your incision:
 - Redness
 - Increasing pain
 - Swelling
 - Foul-smelling drainage
 - A change in the type or amount of drainage
- Nausea and/or vomiting.
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit.

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