

# Lymph Node Dissection: Axilla and Groin

## *How to prepare and what to expect*

*This handout explains how to prepare and what to expect when having a lymph node dissection. It includes self-care instructions during recovery.*

### What is lymph node dissection?

*Lymph node dissection* is surgery to remove some or all of your lymph nodes. Your doctor has advised you to have this surgery to help us see the extent of your cancer. This will help us decide the best treatment plan for you.

The lymph nodes may be taken from your *axilla* (armpit) or groin area.

### How do I prepare for this surgery?

#### Medicines

For 1 week before your surgery, do **not** take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting. Two of these are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). 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.

#### Plan Ahead

You may go home the same day as your surgery, or you may recover in the hospital for 1 to 2 days.

- Make plans for someone to take care of your home, children, and pets, in case you stay overnight in the hospital.



*You may need to stay in the hospital for 1 to 2 days after your surgery.*

- If you go home the same day as your surgery:
  - You will need an adult to drive you home. **You cannot drive yourself or take a taxi or bus home by yourself.**
  - An adult **must** stay with you the first night.

## Day Before Surgery

- **Shower:** The night before your biopsy, use the special 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 clothes.
- **Arrival time:** The pre-surgery nurse will call you by **5 p.m.** the night before your biopsy. If your procedure is 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 nurse will tell you when to come to the hospital and remind you:

- Not to eat or drink after a certain time.
- Which of your regular medicines to take or not take, and to sip only enough water to swallow your pills.

## Surgery Day

- **Shower:** Before you leave home, take another shower using the special soap. Follow the same steps as you did for your shower the day before surgery.
- **Heating blanket:** At the hospital, we will cover you with a heating blanket while you wait to go to the operating room (OR). Keeping your body warm helps reduce your risk of infection. Please ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.

## What to Expect After Surgery

### For Your Safety

Medicine you receive during and after surgery will affect your ability to think clearly. For **24 hours** after your surgery, do **not**:

- Drive or travel alone
- Use machines

- Drink alcohol
- Sign any legal papers or make important decisions
- Be responsible for children, pets, or an adult who needs care

### **Incision and Dressing Care**

Your incision will be closed with stitches that will dissolve over time. A *dressing* (bandage) will cover your incision. Before you leave the hospital, we will give you 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. This drain will 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

**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 Control**

Take your medicine as instructed. Please read the handout you received about constipation after surgery.

### **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 surgery.

## 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 joint moving.

## 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.

## When to Call

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
  - Drainage that smells bad
  - A change in the type or amount of drainage
- Nausea or vomiting
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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 to page the resident on call for Surgery.

Or, ask to page your surgeon:

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_