



## **Lymph Node Dissection**

---

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction.....	2
Before Surgery .....	3
Day of Surgery.....	5
While in the Hospital.....	6
General Discharge Instructions .....	8
When Should I Call the Doctor? .....	9
Arm Care Precautions .....	10
Leg Care Precautions.....	11
About Node Dissection.....	12



## Lymph Node Dissection

# INTRODUCTION

You are scheduled to be admitted to NYU Hospitals Center for a **Lymph Node Dissection** in either your **arm** or your **leg**. Please read this handout, which discusses what you can expect during your stay in the hospital as well as after you go home. It describes how the members of the health care team: doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses and others, will work with you, the most important team member, to ensure a smooth transition to home. Please share this information with your family members and/or friends.

**Bring the information packet to the hospital, as staff will be reviewing it with you.**

It is anticipated that you will be discharged **the day after surgery** depending upon your surgery. Many people are surprised at how quickly they can return home after surgery. The health care team will be helping you with any concerns you have about discharge. Included in this booklet is a list of questions to help you plan for your discharge. If you have any questions, please speak with your doctor or nurse.



## Lymph Node Dissection

# BEFORE SURGERY

### MD OFFICE

Once the decision has been made for surgery and insurance approval has been granted, you will be given a pre-admission packet in your doctor's office containing information necessary to complete the admission process. This packet includes the following forms:

- Personal and insurance information for the admitting office
- Health care proxy
- Health history that you will need to complete and bring with you to Pre-Admission Testing

### PRE-ADMISSION TESTING

Several days to a week before your surgery, you will be scheduled for an appointment at Pre-Admission Testing. At this appointment you will:

- ◆ Have an interview and an assessment with a nurse and a resident or nurse practitioner from your surgeon's service.
- ◆ Meet with an anesthesiologist who will explain the type of anesthesia you will have.
- ◆ Have blood tests, EKG and in some cases, a chest x-ray.
- ◆ Sign a consent form giving your permission for the surgery after it has been explained to you.
- ◆ Have additional tests if they are indicated.



## Lymph Node Dissection

### ADDITIONAL PREPARATION

- ◆ Avoid aspirin, aspirin-containing products and medications from the class known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents for 10 days before surgery.
  
- ◆ If you are taking Coumadin or aspirin for heart, vascular or neurological problems, discuss any needed changes with your doctor.
  
- ◆ You only need to bring slippers and a robe to the hospital. Please do not bring any valuables, such as cash, jewelry, or credit cards, to the hospital.
  
- ◆ Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before your surgery.
  
- ◆ Shower the night before or morning of surgery.
  
- ◆ The morning of surgery, take your medications, with a sip of water, as recommended by your physician.



## Lymph Node Dissection

### DAY OF SURGERY

You should report to the Same Day Admit Unit, 400 East 34<sup>th</sup> Street, 6th floor at the specified time. Here you will be admitted and final preparations for surgery will be completed.

- ◆ Immediately before you go to the Operating room you will need to change into a hospital gown and remove all jewelry, including wedding ring, dentures, etc.
- ◆ You may be given a sedative to help you relax.
- ◆ The surgery will generally take 2 - 3 hours (preparation and actual surgery) and 2 hours in the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU).
- ◆ Your visitors can wait in the Same Day Admit waiting area (maximum of 2 visitors), or in the Stoler Family Waiting Area in the Tisch Hospital lobby. It is advisable for one contact person to let the surgeon's office know where he/she can be contacted after surgery.

Immediately after surgery you will be taken to the PACU on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor until the effects of the anesthesia wears off. Generally, from the PACU you will be transferred to a room on one of the surgical floors. Visitors are not allowed in the PACU but your family members or friends will be able to visit you soon after you are transferred to your room.



## Lymph Node Dissection

### WHILE IN THE HOSPITAL

#### ASSESSMENT

- ◆ Your nurse will monitor your condition. Your blood pressure, pulse, and temperature will be taken.
- ◆ The dressing over your incision and the affected limb will be checked for color and temperature.

#### DIET

- ◆ You will receive a clear liquid diet. If you tolerate clear liquids, then you will resume your usual diet the evening after surgery.

#### ACTIVITY

- ◆ The evening of surgery you will be allowed out of bed to go to the bathroom. The nursing staff will help you get out the first few times.
- ◆ Use the incentive spirometer 10 times every hour while awake to prevent possible lung problems. Follow with coughing and deep breathing exercises.
- ◆ If you had an axillary lymph node dissection, the affected arm will be elevated on a pillow to decrease swelling. If you had an inguinal lymph node dissection, your leg will be elevated when you get out of bed.

#### MEDICATIONS

- ◆ You will receive several doses of IV antibiotics. After this, they may be changed to antibiotics that can be taken orally.
- ◆ Pain medication will be given to you by injection or orally the day of surgery. By the day after surgery, pain medication will be given orally only. You will be asked to rate your pain on a scale of 0 – 10 with 0 being no pain and 10 being unbearable pain, both before



---

## Lymph Node Dissection

and after you take pain medication. This scale will help the staff ensure that you are comfortable.

- ◆ Other medications that you took before surgery will be resumed. Ask your nurse if you do not receive your usual medications. **DO NOT TAKE** your own medications.

## INCISION CARE

- ◆ During surgery, you will have a drain inserted to remove fluid from the site of the surgery. The nurse will check the amount of fluid that is draining and empty it if needed.
- ◆ The drain will be removed when the amount of fluid drained decreases. If you go home with the drain in place, your nurse will show you how to empty it and keep a daily log of the drainage. You will share this log with your surgeon during your first visit after you are discharged. The nurse will provide you with a measuring cup.
- ◆ Usually, you can shower once the drain is removed, but ask your doctor for specific recommendations.

## ARM/LEG CARE

- ◆ After lymph node removal, it is important that you take steps to prevent infection and minimize swelling in the affected limb.
- ◆ Enclosed is an Arm/Leg Care information sheet that lists steps you can take to prevent infection and minimize swelling in the affected limb.

## DISCHARGE PLANNING

- ◆ It is anticipated that you will be discharged the day after surgery. Discharge time is 10 am.



## Lymph Node Dissection

# GENERAL DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS

## DIET

- ◆ You can resume your usual diet.

## MEDICATIONS

- ◆ You will be given a prescription for pain medication. Do not take pain medication for a longer period of time, or more medication than your physician recommends.
- ◆ Generally, you can resume all medications you took before surgery. Ask your doctor for specific instructions.
- ◆ If you receive a prescription for antibiotics, make sure you take them for as long as prescribed.

## ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Unless instructed otherwise, once the drain is removed, you can shower. Ask your surgeon for specific instructions. When showering, wash the incision with mild soap, rinse well, and pat dry.
- ◆ Ask your doctor when you can resume activities such as driving.
- ◆ Remember to follow the arm/leg care instructions.

## FOLLOW-UP

- ◆ Make a follow-up appointment to see your surgeon in 10 – 12 days after you are discharged.



## Lymph Node Dissection

### WHEN SHOULD I CALL THE DOCTOR?

Your doctor should be notified if any of the following signs and symptoms develop (possible danger signs):

- ◆ Fever over 100.8 °. For a reliable temperature reading, no aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol), or Ibuprofen, should be taken for 3-4 hours before.
- ◆ Pain not relieved by pain medication taken at the prescribed doses and times.
- ◆ Increased swelling or signs of infection such as redness of the affected limb.
- ◆ Redness or drainage from the incision site.



## Lymph Node Dissection

### ARM CARE PRECAUTIONS

From now on, it is important to be more careful with your arm if the lymph nodes have been removed. Try to prevent infection and do not restrict the circulation of your arm. If you develop redness or swelling of the arm, notify your surgeon. Following these simple instructions, called arm precautions, will help to prevent infection and lymphedema or swelling of the arm.

- ◆ Wash all cuts well with soap and water and apply an antibacterial ointment such as Bacitracin.
- ◆ Do not cut your cuticles. Use hand cream (cocoa butter) or lotion to soften the cuticles. Use clean equipment for manicures.
- ◆ Wear canvas gloves for gardening, rubber gloves when cleaning, and oven mitts when taking hot pots or casseroles out of the oven.
- ◆ Use an electric razor for shaving your underarms.
- ◆ Avoid very heavy lifting or carrying.
- ◆ Carry heavy shoulder bags on the opposite arm.
- ◆ Wear sunblock with SPF 30 or greater to prevent sunburn.
- ◆ **Have blood pressures, blood drawing, injections and vaccinations done on the opposite arm whenever possible. If lymph nodes have been removed from both arms, you can have blood pressures and blood drawing done but you should alternate the arm used. It is still important to follow the other necessary precautions.**
- ◆ Avoid tight elastic in the sleeves of your clothing.

Watch for:

- ◆ Observe insect bites for signs of infection.
- ◆ Changes in arm appearance such as sudden swelling, redness, or tenderness.
- ◆ Cuts, burns, bruises, or insect bites that become inflamed and do not heal normally.



---

## Lymph Node Dissection

# LEG CARE PRECAUTIONS

From now on, it is important to be more careful with your leg if the lymph nodes have been removed. Try to prevent infection and do not restrict the circulation of your leg. If you develop redness or swelling of the leg, notify your surgeon. Following these simple instructions, called leg precautions, will help to prevent infection and lymphedema or swelling of the leg.

- ◆ Wash all cuts well with soap and water and apply an antibacterial ointment such as Bacitracin.
- ◆ Use insect repellent to prevent insect bites.
- ◆ Use pants to prevent cuts, scratches, and burns (from the sun, hot water, cigarette ashes, splattering grease).
- ◆ Use sunscreen (SPF 30).
- ◆ Use a mild soap and warm water when bathing. Follow by applying cocoa butter to prevent drying of the skin.
- ◆ Use an electric razor or depilatory cream for hair removal to avoid any damage to the skin.
- ◆ Do not wear clothing with elastic or constricting bands (especially undergarments and socks).

Watch for:

- ◆ Observe insect bites for signs of infection.
- ◆ Changes in leg appearance such as sudden swelling, redness, or tenderness.
- ◆ Cuts, burns, bruises, or insect bites that become inflamed and do not heal normally.



## Lymph Node Dissection

# LYMPH NODE DISSECTION

The lymph system operates throughout the body by filtering out bacteria. The lymphatic system is composed of vessels that carry lymph to small bean-shaped structures called lymph nodes.

Surgery for certain types of cancer such as for breast cancer or melanoma, may require that lymph nodes be removed to determine if the cancer has spread to any of the adjacent nodes. Once lymph nodes are removed, it is important that you take steps to prevent swelling or infection in the affected limb.

You need to follow precautions for your arm if you had an axillary (underarm) node dissection and leg precautions if you had an inguinal (groin) node dissection.