



Dr. *Francis* T. Hall

EAR, NOSE, THROAT, HEAD & NECK

Lymph node biopsy care

A lump in the neck is frequently due to an enlarged lymph node (lymph gland). There are many lymph nodes on each side of the neck. Lymph nodes may be enlarged because of an infection or cancer. Usually, an ultrasound scan and a needle biopsy (fine needle aspiration) will determine the cause of the enlarged lymph node. Sometimes it is recommended to have one of the lymph nodes removed to determine why the lymph node is enlarged. The pathologist looks at the lymph node under the microscope and reports on the cause of the enlarged lymph node. A lymph node biopsy is the name given to the operation where one or more lymph nodes are removed to establish the diagnosis (cause of the enlarged lymph node). It is not necessary to remove all the lymph nodes to make the diagnosis.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover after removal of a lymph node and what to expect. Each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to feel better as quickly as possible.

What to expect:

- You may have a plastic drain in your neck. A drain is a small plastic tube connected to a plastic bottle. It drains tissue fluid and any blood out from under the skin of your neck. The drain will be removed by the nurse once the volume in the drain is less than 30ml in 24 hours. Usually, the drain is removed on the first or second day following your operation.
- You may have a sore throat after surgery. The tube the anaesthetist puts down your throat to help you breathe during surgery often irritates the throat and sometimes causes a hoarse voice after surgery. Thankfully the sore throat usually resolves quickly in 2-3 days. You should drink plenty of fluids, and it may be helpful to take throat lozenges to relieve your symptoms.
- Many people have a stiff sore neck after surgery. This is due to the position that you were in during surgery. Please stretch the neck by looking up at the ceiling and also rotating your head from side to side several times each day. This helps stretch the muscles and return things back to normal.
- Many people feel a tightness in their neck at the site of the operation. This will improve over a few weeks and the same stretching exercises mentioned above help this too.
- Some people find their shoulder is stiff and sore after the operation. It is important to exercise your shoulder after the operation by lifting your arm out and up.
- It is common for the skin above and below the incision to be numb after the operation. This usually improves a lot over the subsequent 2-6 months.
- It is usual to feel tired after surgery. Some of this tiredness is due to the operation and some is due to the general anaesthetic. Rest up, get some light daily exercise and the tiredness will quickly resolve.

Activity:

- Do not drive in the 24 hours following your surgery.
- Dr Hall recommends taking 1 week off work following a lymph node biopsy.
- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover.
- Try to walk each day. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk.
- In order to reduce the chance of bleeding, avoid strenuous activities, such as bicycle riding, jogging, weight lifting, or aerobic exercise, for 2 weeks.
- Refrain from heavy lifting (greater than 7kg) in the first 2 weeks following surgery.

Diet:

- Resume your regular diet, there are no dietary restrictions.

Shower/ bathing:

- Please keep the incision dry and shower from the neck down for the first two days after surgery.
- If you have a drain, please shower from the neck down until three days after the drain is removed. You may shower or bath as usual three days after the drain is removed.

Pain medicines:

- Take pain medicines exactly as directed (Dr Hall will prescribe).
- If you think your pain medicine is making you sick to your stomach:
 - Take your pain medicine after meals (unless Dr Hall has told you not to).
 - Ask Dr Hall for a different pain medicine.

Incision care:

- Your wound is covered with Steri Strips. Steri Strips are thin adhesive strips which are placed over your incision to help it heal. Leave the Steri Strips in place until they fall off on their own. They often fall off the skin within 10 to 14 days. Remember to pat the incision site dry and not to rub a towel across the incision site as this will loosen the Steri Strips and they may fall off too early.
- Please keep the incision dry and shower from the neck down for the first two days after surgery.
- If you have a drain, please shower from the neck down until three days after the drain is removed. You may shower or bath as usual three days after the drain is removed.
- Your stitches are below the skin (subcuticular) and are dissolvable.
- Keep sun off your wound for 6 months. This helps prevent the wound going a dark colour (post inflammatory hyperpigmentation).
- There are three ways to keep the sun off the wound: wear clothing that covers the area, use sunblock or simply cover the wound with tape. Dr Hall recommends ½ inch light brown micropore tape (a 3M product). You can buy this product from most pharmacies.

Problems:

- Problems are uncommon following lymph node biopsy.
- Shoulder problems. Some lymph nodes lie right next to the nerve to your shoulder (accessory nerve). If a lymph node is removed from adjacent the accessory nerve, sometimes this can result in the nerve not working properly for a while and difficult elevating the arm above the head. Rarely the nerve may be accidentally injured during the operation. Physiotherapy can help.
- The nerve to your lower lip (marginal mandibular branch of the facial nerve) dips down into your neck. If a lymph node is removed from adjacent this nerve, sometimes this can result in this nerve not working properly for a while. If this is the case, it frequently recovers. Rarely this nerve does not recover in which case your lower lip remains crooked when you smile.
- There are nerves in your neck to your vocal cords, swallowing muscles, and tongue. Rarely, these nerves may be accidentally injured during your surgery. If this happens you will have trouble speaking clearly or swallowing. Dr Hall will be able to advise. Speech language therapy can help you retrain your voice or advise on strategies to help you swallow.
- Sometimes bleeding can occur under the skin at the site of the operation. If this happens it is usually in the first 24 hours after surgery and usually you need to go back to the operating theatre so the blood can be drained, and the bleeding controlled.
- Sometimes tissue fluid either chyle (a milky fluid) or lymph (a clear fluid) collects under the skin at the site of the operation. If there is a lot of tissue fluid you may need to go back to the operating theatre for control of this fluid.

When do I get my results?

- Usually, the pathologist sends a typed signed report to Dr Hall about one to two weeks after the surgery. Occasionally it may take the pathologist longer to issue a report either because of the complexity of your case or because of a higher than usual workload. Dr Hall will contact you by phone or text once he receives the pathologist's report in his inbox.

Follow up appointment

- Dr Hall usually sees his lymph node biopsy patients one week after surgery. His secretary Rebecca will arrange your follow up appointment for you. If you have not heard from Rebecca within one week of your surgery, please contact her on 09 281 2963.

Things to look out for:

- If there is sudden swelling of your neck, go straight to the emergency department and call Dr Francis Hall immediately on 021 733 677.
- If your incision is getting sorer or redder over a few days call Dr Hall.

Any problems call or text Dr Francis Hall on 021 733 677

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