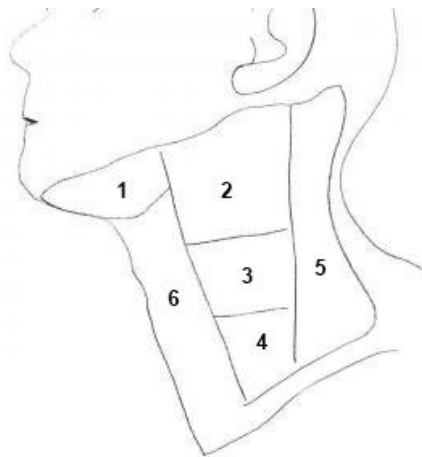


Cervical Lymph Node (Neck) Dissection

What are lymph nodes?

Lymph (pronounced “limf”) nodes work as filters for our body fluid called lymph fluid. A problem, such as infection, injury, or cancer, will cause lymph nodes to swell as they work to filter out the “bad” cells. Lymph nodes are found in different parts of the body:

- **Axillary** nodes are under and around the armpit.
- **Inguinal** nodes are in the groin.
- **Cervical** nodes are in the head and neck area. Below is an image of the different levels of lymph nodes in the neck.



Cancer may start in your lymph nodes (i.e. lymphoma) or spread through the lymph system.

You may need a lymph node **biopsy** to figure out if you have lymph node cancer. A biopsy would mean removing 1-2 lymph nodes.

If there is a risk that cancer has spread to the lymph nodes in your neck, or if it has already spread, your treatment may include having a neck dissection.

What is neck dissection?

A neck dissection is the removal of lymph nodes and nearby tissue from the neck.

Types of Neck Dissection

Radical Dissection: Remove lymph node groups 1 to 6, and surrounding structures.

Modified Dissection: Remove lymph node groups 1 to 6, while sparing one or more of the other surrounding structures.

Selective Dissection: Remove a select group of lymph nodes with or without other structures. This is the most common type of neck dissection.

A lymph node dissection can either be done by itself or at the same time you have surgery to remove any cancer.

Surgery

The surgery will take 1-3 hours and you will be under general anesthesia. Expect to stay in the hospital 1-2 nights.

What can I expect after surgery?

You will have an incision on your neck covered with a gauze bandage.

You may have drainage tubes on the affected side. Drainage tubes are removed 1-2 days after surgery.

You may have some numbness, tingling or decreased feeling in the jaw or neck. Be careful around extreme heat and cold. Use caution when using heating pads, ice packs and hair dryers. Be careful when shaving.

You may feel a pulling in the neck muscles. You may have decreased strength or a drooping of your shoulder on the side of your surgery. This will get better but can last up to 6-8 weeks after surgery. You may be given some gentle exercises to do to help improve your strength in that arm.

How do I care for my wound?

You may shower 24 hours after the drainage tube is removed. Wash around the incision gently with soapy water, rinse and pat dry. Your surgeon will tell you if you should apply petroleum jelly (Vaseline[®]) to your incision.

No swimming or soaking in water for 14 days.

If you have stitches, they will be removed at your follow-up visit. If you have Steri-strips (pieces of tape) over the incision, leave them on until your next doctor visit. Curled tape edges may be trimmed with small scissors.

What is a seroma and how do I know if I have one?

A seroma is a fluid-filled bulge that forms under the skin where you had surgery. If you get a small seroma, your body will absorb this over time. If it gets larger and causes pain, contact your surgeon. This is **not** an emergency. You may need to have the fluid drained.

What about pain?

Expect that your wound will be tender.

- Use pain medicine as prescribed.
- Do not drive while taking narcotic pain medicine.
- Ask your surgeon if you can take ibuprofen, Advil[®], Aleve[®] or naproxen.
- If you have nausea, take your pain medicine with food.

- Prevent constipation from pain medicines.
 - Eat plenty of fiber (bran, oats, fruits and vegetables).
 - Drink 6-8 glasses of water a day.
 - Take a stool softener, if needed.

Activity Guidelines

You can drive once you can move your head from side to side and you are no longer taking prescription pain medicine.

Light exercise, such as walking, is fine. Avoid strenuous exercise for 1-2 weeks. Avoid straining or extreme bending of your neck. Do not lift more than 20 pounds for the first week.

Keep your head raised at least 30° for one week. Do not lie flat in bed. Use at least 2 pillows.

When can I return to work?

Most people need to be off work for 1-2 weeks. If your job requires regular heavy lifting, you may require more time off. Please discuss this with your surgeon.

When to Call

- **If you have trouble breathing, a sudden swelling in your throat, or cannot swallow, Call 911.**
- Firmness or bruising.
- Heavy bleeding. Some oozing is common for a few days.
- Incision opens.
- Sudden increase in pain.
- Signs of infection like spreading redness or swelling, foul-smelling drainage or pus.
- Fever greater than 100.4° F (38° C). taken by mouth 2 times, 4 hours apart.

- A seroma that gets larger and is causing pain.
- Any other symptoms that concern you.

Who to Call

If your surgery was at University Hospital, call the ENT Clinic, Monday-Friday from 8:00 am - 5:00 pm, at **(608) 263-6190**.

After 5:00 pm or weekends, the clinic number will give you the paging operator. Ask for the ENT doctor on-call. Leave your name, and phone number with area code. The doctor will call you back.

If your surgery was at The American Center call **(608) 440-6300**. This is a 24-hour number.

The toll-free number is **1-800-323-8942**.

Ask the operator to transfer you to the place where you had your surgery.

If your surgery was at Meriter or Madison Surgery Center call **(608) 287-2100**. This is a 24-hour number.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2020. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4500