

LYMPH NODE SURGERY:

Axilla, Groin or Neck Dissection

What to Expect

OPERATION DURATION

This surgery is performed under General Anaesthetic and usually takes approximately 2-4 hours.

HOSPITAL STAY

Depending on your recovery, you will most likely be in hospital for 2-3 nights. Everyone is different, and your recovery will be tailored to you.

Dr Taylor will not be in to visit you every day whilst you are in hospital - he will phone your nurses for daily updates and provide over-the-phone instructions. He will come in to see you if you have any issues.

What Complications May Occur After This Procedure?

GENERAL POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS OF ANY PROCEDURE

- Bleeding
- Infection at the surgical site
- Allergic reaction to equipment, materials or medication
- Blood clot in your leg or lungs
- Chest infection

SPECIFIC POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS OF THIS PROCEDURE

- Seroma (collection of fluid) - This is quite common and, in some cases, may require draining
- Lymphedema (disruption of the normal lymphatic flow, causing potentially permanent swelling of the limb)
- Haematoma (collection of blood; this may require draining)
- Potential damage to nearby structures (vessels and nerves)
- Skin necrosis (around the surgical site)

Axilla

- Shoulder weakness
- Numbness or continued pain around the armpit or inner part of your upper arm

Neck

- Facial swelling (uncommon)
- Numbness to cheek, ear or Neck
- Shoulder weakness (uncommon)
- Change in speech and swallowing (rare)

Groin

- Numbness in the upper thigh

CONSEQUENCES OF THIS PROCEDURE

- Discomfort, bruising and swelling (temporary)
- Scars at the affected region

How to Prepare for Your Procedure

HOW LONG SHOULD YOU BOOK OFF WORK

This depends on your profession - If you work in an office/ non-strenuous job 2-3 weeks, however, if you have a physically demanding job, this may change and will be dependent on the type of work. Your specific requirements will be discussed with you on an individual basis. .

Please email admin@drduncantaylor.com.au if you require a medical certificate.

PRE-OP WASH

Please purchase a pre-op chlorhexidine wash from the pharmacy. Use this whilst showering, the night before and the morning of your surgery.

FASTING

You cannot have any food or fluids (including lollies, chewing gum) 6 hours prior to your surgery.
You can have some sips of water only up to 2 hours prior to your surgery and then nothing at all after this time.

If you take regular medication, please check with our nurse to see if you should be taking your medication in the lead up to/ on the day of your surgery. Some medications should be withheld.

MORNING OF SURGERY

You will be asked to arrive at the hospital approximately 2 hours prior to your surgery start time - Our Practice Manager will provide you with your admission information (time/ where to go) 1-2 weeks prior to your surgery date.

Dr Taylor will see you in the pre-operative area before you go into theatre. He will mark your surgical site prior to your surgery.

Post-Operative Instructions

DRAINS

You will have 1 - 2 drains inserted into the wound. This is to help drain any fluid from building up in this area. We hope to remove these prior to your discharge from the hospital. However, in some cases, you may need to go home with them in situ. If so, Hospital in the Home (HITH) will visit you daily for care and management. Removal of your drains should only occur after a discussion with Dr Taylor.

ACTIVITY

You can get up and move the same day after your surgery, once you have recovered from your general anaesthetic.

1-3 weeks: You can potter around the house, complete deep breathing exercises and light exercises not involving surgical site.

3-6 weeks: You can potter around the house, complete deep-breathing exercises, and do light exercises not involving the surgical site.

After 6 Weeks: After this time, if healing well, you can ease back into your usual activities.

You can drive when you feel safe and able to, generally after a few weeks.

PAIN RELIEF

You should not be in significant pain after your surgery. Your anaesthetist will prescribe regular pain relief to take on the ward post-surgery. If you have pain on top of this, you should ask for additional pain medication, which will be prescribed on your drug chart should you need it.

You will not be discharged from the hospital until your pain is well managed on oral medications. Please take paracetamol regularly. If you have severe pain that is not responding to the pain relief, please phone our nurse during office hours.

Please do not put ice packs or heat packs on your wounds.

Do not take aspirin.

ANTI-INFLAMMATORIES

You will be prescribed some anti-inflammatories whilst you are in the hospital, and you will also be discharged with some.

Please take the entire course, even if you are not in pain. Please take this medication as prescribed on the box by your anaesthetist.

ANTIBIOTICS

You may be given a course of oral antibiotics. Please take the full course.

BLEEDING

If the wound starts to bleed, please apply firm pressure for 15 minutes. If a dressing is in place, please do this over the top of the dressing (do not remove the dressing).

This should control the bleeding. However, if it is not easily controlled or does not subside, please phone our nurse specialist during working hours, go to an after-hours GP clinic or visit an emergency department.

INFECTION

If your wound becomes hot, swollen, oozes pus or you are spiking temperatures the wound may be infected. Please phone our nurse immediately within business hours or attend your GP, after hours GP or Emergency.

WOUND CARE & DRESSING CARE

Axilla or Groin

Your wound will be covered with surgical tape and glue – this is waterproof, and you can shower as normal and pat dry.

After approximately 3-4 weeks, gently peel the dressing off while it is wet in the shower.

Neck

Your wound will be left open with an ointment applied. Continue to apply this ointment 4 times a day.

If you do have a standard dressing over the tape, please sponge bath around this to avoid getting the dressing wet and leave it intact until you are seen in the nurse dressing clinic 5-10 days post-op.

Do not immerse the wound in water, i.e. swimming or bathing for 6 weeks, or until the wound is completely healed.

Bruising takes around 2-3 weeks to resolve, and swelling can take up to 3-6 months to resolve completely. Usually sutures on the axilla / groin will dissolve and sutures on the neck will require removal.

REMOVAL OF SUTURES

If you have sutures requiring removal, this will be completed in our nurse clinic 1-3 weeks post-surgery.

MASSAGING FOR SCAR REDUCTION

Commence massaging your scars once your dressings are removed and wounds have healed – approximately 3-4 weeks post-op.

It is recommended that you massage your scars with a good moisturiser (e.g. Sorbolene or QV) or Bio-Oil for 2 minutes, twice daily. Wipe off any excess product, then apply either:

- A silicone gel (e.g. Strataderm), which dries to form a protective film over the scar, or
- Silicone tape.

Continue this treatment for 3–6 months.

HISTOPATHOLOGY RESULTS

The nodes will be sent to histopathology for testing. The results of these tests take approximately 7-14 days. You will be scheduled for a consultation with Dr Taylor, to discuss your results.

LYMPHEDEMA MANAGEMENT

Lymphedema can occur following removal of lymph nodes from groin or axilla.

You will be referred to a lymphedema therapist or physio for monitoring and symptoms management. This often includes fitting garments, manual lymphatic drainage, exercises, education and skin care, as required.

Dr Taylor may suggest you have a pre-operative appointment with a Lymphedema Therapist for a baseline assessment and education.

Follow Up

Dr Taylor will be in contact with the nurses looking after you on the ward. If you are well post-op, he will discharge you after speaking with your nurse over the phone. He will only come in to see you on the ward if you have any issues.

If you are concerned at all or have any questions, please phone our clinic 9am-4pm Mon-Fri. Outside these hours, present to an after-hours GP or the Emergency department if urgent care is required.

Follow-up appointments will depend on your drain output and / or whether you are being attended to by Hospital in the Home nurses. You will be advised post-surgery.

Appointments may include:

- 7-10 day post-op nurse review (wound check and possible removal of sutures).
- 10-14 days post-op.
- Approx 21 days post-op (if required).
- 6 weeks post-surgery review in Dr Duncan Taylor's day clinic.