



The Lymph Nodes

Sentinel lymph node biopsy, axillary dissection: What to Expect at Home

Your Recovery

Not all cancers and breast lumps can spread (metastasize), and lymph nodes are not removed in all cases of breast cancer for this reason. Ask your surgeon about this.

Your doctor may have removed some lymph nodes in your armpit (axilla) to see if the cancer has spread. If so, you may feel either numbness or tingling ("pins and needles") in your axilla, side of the breast, and the upper-inner arm. This is common and usually resolves with enough time.

It is common to be quite sore in the axilla after surgery, even more so than at the breast incision and for a longer time. Tightness or a pulling sensation are common. Gentle stretching overhead and gentle self-massage can help ease this discomfort and may help it resolve more quickly.

Instructions to care for your wound at home:

1. Shower or sponge bath the night of surgery, or the day after, to clean off the skin-prep used in surgery. This may reduce the chance of a rash.
2. Keep the incision(s) clean and dry throughout the day. Leave the skin glue in place for at least 10 days – don't pick at it or pull it off early. You may opt to leave it alone until it begins to flake off. This is fine and may take more than a month to fully come off.
3. Don't lift, push, pull, or carry more than 15 lbs. with the arm on the side of the incision for 2 weeks. Don't perform repetitive reaching, pushing, pulling, or repetitive shoulder motions in general. These movements tend to cause more pain after surgery.
4. Most people find that breast surgery isn't terribly painful, and often recall the needle biopsy feeling as bad or worse. They typically use one or two prescription pain medication pills, and then opt for ice packs and Tylenol/ibuprofen. For this reason, we are careful not to prescribe



POST OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

pain medicine that is unnecessarily strong and puts you at risk for side-effects, when it is not needed.

Please consider that while we don't know your body like you do, we do know our profession very well and this is our best plan for getting you safely through surgery using as little medication as needed to allow you to rest and recover. Please trust our judgement.

- a. For pain control, start by using an ice pack placed over the sore spot for 15 minutes, as many times a day as you need. Keep a layer of cloth between your skin and the pack to protect you from injuring your skin.
- b. In addition to the ice pack, you may choose to alternate taking Tylenol and Motrin or Advil (ibuprofen) every 3 hours. For example, take Tylenol at 9am, then Motrin at 12pm, then Tylenol at 3pm, and so on. If stronger pain medication is needed despite the above measures, you may also choose to take an Ultram/Tramadol, but use it only when the other measures are not enough to allow you to relax and rest. Any, all, or none of these may be used for pain relief. If the pain is tolerable, or if you prefer, you may of course opt to not use any of these measures.

6. Please call us at 208-392-3354 to speak with a nurse about any questions or concerns you may have.

7. You will see Jay Burrup PA-C, or Dr Menen, 2 to 4 weeks after surgery for your follow-up appointment.