

Cervical lymph node biopsy

This document should not replace the advice of your relevant health care professional.

What is a Cervical Lymph Node biopsy?

There are many lymph nodes in the body – particularly in the neck, armpits and groin. They are part of your immune system. This operation aims to take out an enlarged node in the neck. It is then examined in order to diagnose a number of different conditions such as infections, cancers and auto-immune diseases.

What is the operation like?

The operation is performed with you asleep under a general anaesthetic and takes about 30 minutes to 1 hour. Usually you will go home on the same day. Sometimes the surgeon decides they would prefer you to stay overnight. Before the operation you will see a member of the surgical team and the anaesthetist.

What can go wrong?

A lymph node biopsy is a safe procedure. However it is important that you are aware of the risks of this procedure, as listed below.

General complications

Nausea, vomiting, sore throat and drowsiness may occur as a result of the anaesthetic. Serious drug reactions related to the anaesthetic are very rare.

Specific problems

- **Bleeding & Infection**

A small amount of fluid leaking into the dressings is common. Less often a collection of blood called a haematoma can form under the surgical site. This may need to be drained with another procedure.

- **Infection**

An infection can occur in the operation site which can cause this area to become red, hot and painful. You may need a course of antibiotics.

- **Nerve Damage**



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There are many nerves in the neck which control both sensation and the movement of muscles. Depending on the location of the surgical site there are many different nerves that can be at risk of damage. The chance of permanent nerve damage is small (< 1%).

The major nerves at risk include:

- **Greater auricular nerve:** provides sensation to and behind the ear
- **Accessory nerve:** helps to shrug the shoulder
- **Marginal mandibular nerve:** moves the lower lip
- **Lingual and Hypoglossal nerves:** provide taste sensation and tongue movement

- **Need for repeat biopsy**

Occasionally the biopsy sample does not give a diagnosis and if there are ongoing concerns the surgical team may need to repeat the procedure.

- **Lymph fluid leak/swelling**

Although uncommon, a leak of lymph fluid can occur resulting in watery fluid collecting under the skin or leaking fluid from the operation site. This can usually be followed up by your surgeon at your review appointment.



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