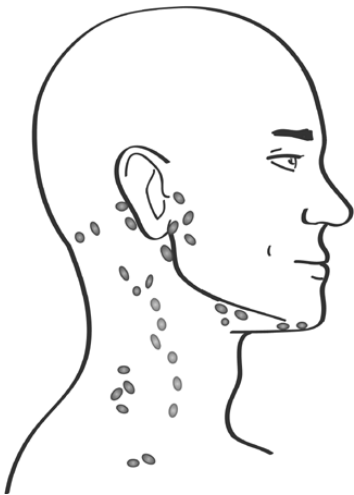


## Neck Dissection Surgery

Lymph nodes are part of your immune system, and you have hundreds in the head and neck. If your surgeon suspects your cancer has spread to nearby lymph nodes, you will need surgery to remove all the lymph nodes in that area. We call this surgery a neck dissection.

After surgery the removed lymph nodes are sent to the lab where they are tested for cancer. This helps determine the next steps in your treatment. You will review the results at your postoperative visit with your surgeon.



*Gray dots show location of lymph nodes in your neck.*

The amount of lymph nodes removed from your neck depends on several things:

- Type of cancer you have
- Size of the primary cancer tumor
- Location of the cancer

Your care team will talk with you about the extent of your neck dissection before your surgery.

### Possible Side Effects and What You Can Do

**Pain.** After any surgery, some pain is normal. While you are in the hospital, your care team will monitor and treat your pain. They will ask you often about how much pain you are feeling. This helps your care team decide what pain medicines will work best for you. They

may put pain medicine directly into your veins through an IV or give you pills.

Follow the directions for your pain medicines. Tell your care team if your pain level stays the same or gets worse.

**Infection.** Any time you have an opening in your skin, there is a risk of infection. Good hand washing is the best and easiest way to prevent infection. Wash or disinfect your hands often, especially after using the bathroom, before eating, and before touching the area of your surgery. Make sure your caregivers and visitors do, too.

Watch for these signs that show an infection may be starting:

- More pain, redness, or warmth at your surgery area
- More blood or fluid coming from your surgery area
- A fever of 100.4°F(38°C) or higher.

If you notice any of these signs, call your care team right away.

**Swelling.** Your surgery team will place a drain in your neck temporarily to prevent fluid or blood from collecting under your skin. You may be sent home with the drain. Your nurse will teach you how to care for the drain at home. An appointment will be made for you to have it removed in a few days after you leave the hospital.

Swelling around the surgery area can cause pressure on your throat. This can make it feel harder to breathe. Swelling can also make it feel harder to swallow. The swelling should get better a few days after surgery. Tell your nurse or speech and swallowing therapist if you have trouble swallowing or if you have questions about what you should eat and drink.

**Bleeding.** Your head and neck have many blood vessels, so bleeding is a risk during this surgery. Your nurses will check the fluid from the drain tubes for signs of too much bleeding. Some bleeding is common right after surgery, but the blood that collects in the drain becomes lighter as you heal.

**Pneumonia.** Pneumonia is a very serious lung infection. Staying in bed for long periods can prevent your lungs from expanding all the way. This can raise the risk of getting pneumonia after surgery. To help prevent pneumonia, your nurses will ask you to start walking and moving as soon after your surgery as it is safe. This helps facilitate deep breathing and expansion of your lungs which can prevent an infection.

**Blood clots.** Not being active raises the risk of blood clots in your legs. If a clot happens, it can move through the veins to your lungs. This can be life threatening. To help prevent blood clots, your nurses will ask you to get up and move around as much as you can. While you are in the hospital, your care team may put foam boots on your legs. The boots inflate and deflate to keep the blood in your leg veins moving to prevent clotting. Your doctor may also prescribe a blood thinner medicine to help prevent blood clots.

### **Questions?**

Contact your cancer care team via MyChart or call 801-587-4566.

In an emergency, call 911 or go to your closest emergency department.