Groin Dissection
What is a Groin dissection?
The aim of a Groin Dissection is to remove the Lymph Nodes. This is undertaken when the cancer cells have travelled from the original skin cancer site and settled in the Lymph Nodes in your groin.

What are Lymph Nodes?
Lymph nodes are present throughout your body. You may have felt swollen Lymph Nodes when you have had an infection such as a simple cold. As well as trapping germs, the Lymph Nodes can also trap cancer cells.

Have I got cancer in my Lymph Nodes?
When a lump is detected the first step is to have a sample taken. This is called a Fine Needle Aspiration and it is sent to the laboratory to be looked at under a microscope. Your doctor will also want you to have scans prior to surgery.

When will my groin dissection be carried out?
A groin dissection is carried out once all the test results are available. You will be admitted to hospital early on the morning of your surgery. You will be in hospital for about 3 days.

What does the surgery involve?
The operation, which takes about 3 hours, is performed under general anaesthetic. All the nodes in that area and some tissue are removed leaving you with a scar across your groin and extending for a short way down the inside of your leg.

What can I expect after the operation?
At the end of the operation one or two small plastic tubes are placed through the skin to drain any fluid that may collect inside the wound. The other ends are connected to bags that usually stay in place for several days before being removed. Some discomfort is to be expected and is usually worse for the first
few days, although it may take a couple of weeks to disappear completely. If required you will be given regular painkillers. The following day you will be encouraged to gently walk around the ward. You may also need to see the physiotherapist for an exercise programme.

You will be discharged home with the drain once you have been taught to look after it, and are happy to do so. When at home you will be able to contact your Skin Cancer Nurse, who will see you in clinic to remove the drain, when appropriate.

What are the possible complications immediately after surgery?

There are potential problems with any operation. With this type of surgery, complications are rare but you may experience some of the following:

- Numbness of the skin surrounding the groin
- Bleeding
- Collection of fluid around the wound
- Infection
- Wound break down
- Swelling of the leg

If any of these complications occur please contact your Skin Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist who will be able to advise you if any treatment is necessary.
What are the possible long-term complications after surgery?

- A visible scar and hollowing of your groin
- Numbness of the skin around the operation site
- Swelling of the leg

What to expect after you go home

At first you will feel rather tired and should spend the first week or so taking it easy. You will be able to work up slowly to your usual activities.

You will be able to start driving once you feel safe to do so. For most people this will take a few weeks. Do not drive if you are not well, alert and able to take emergency action, it is advisable to check with your insurance company before you start driving. You will be able to start work again once you feel able. If your job involves a lot of lifting or heavy work, this will take longer. Liaise with your GP. You should also ask your GP for a sick note for work.

Lymphoedema

What is the Lymphatic System?

Your Lymphatic System is made up of a network of small vessels and groups of Lymph Nodes which are located throughout the body. As the lymph fluid flows through the nodes, it collects and filters out unwanted waste products such as bacteria or cancer cells.

Signs of lymphoedema

Lymphoedema can affect you in a variety of ways. If you notice any of the symptoms below, speak to your Skin Cancer Nurse or GP.
- Swelling
- Heaviness of your leg
- Tightness and stretching of the skin
- Reduced movement of the joints
- Thickening and dryness of the skin
- Discomfort or pins and needles sensation

**Can you prevent lymphoedema?**

While it is not known exactly what causes Lymphoedema an infection or injury to the affected limb may slightly increase your risk of developing Lymphoedema.

Therefore looking after your skin is vital:

- Do not have blood samples or your blood pressure taken on your affected limb.
- Clean even small cuts and grazes straight away. If there appears to be any sign of infection see your GP straight away.
- Use a moisturiser daily to keep your skin soft and supple.
- Take care when cutting nails to avoid breaking the skin.
- Avoid hot baths/saunas/sunbeds. These may increase swelling.
- Avoid sunburn by using a SPF30 sunscreen or above and wear loose fitting clothing.
- Avoid cuts when shaving use an electric razor.
Exercise

- Avoid gaining weight and try to lose some if you are already overweight as this may place extra pressure on the Lymphatic System.
- Avoid strenuous exercise. Heavy lifting and carrying heavy objects should be avoided.
- Gentle exercise is advisable but avoid excessive weight lifting. Walking or swimming will keep your joints supple and is important for lymph drainage.
- During long flights, car or train journeys gentle exercise is advisable.
References and further Information

Lymphoedema Support Network
Tel: 0207 3514480

NGS Macmillan Wellbeing Centre, Southmead Hospital, Bristol
BS10 5NB
Southmead Hospital has a drop-in centre offering a variety of activities/services. For more information telephone 0117 4147051 or ask your Skin Cancer CNS.

Skin Cancer Research Fund (SCaRF)
Based at Southmead Hospital
Telephone: 0117 414 8755

Macmillan Cancer Support
Europe’s leading cancer information charity with over 4,500 pages of up-to-date cancer information, practical advice and support for cancer patients, their families and carers
Telephone: 0808 800 1234

CancerHelp
CancerHelp UK is a free information service about cancer and cancer care for people with cancer and their families. Cancerhelp believes that information about cancer should be freely available to all and written in a way that people can easily understand.
www.cancerhelp.org.uk

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution
If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.