Lymph Node Dissection for Penile Cancer

Exceptional healthcare, personally delivered
Removal of Lymph Nodes

Why are the Lymph Nodes so important when I have penile cancer?

Lymph nodes are small bean shaped glands that can be found all over the body. They form part of the body’s defences against infection. One of their main roles is to drain fluid from the tissues and return it to the blood.

Sometimes if you have an infection you may be able to feel these glands become enlarged.

Penile cancer can spread to the inguinal lymph glands (the glands at the top of your thighs/groin area), and if left untreated can then spread to the lymph glands in your pelvis (lower abdomen).

It is thought that approximately 50% of men will have enlarged lymph glands at presentation with their cancer (2). Of these, half will be enlarged due to tumour and half due to infection. Of the other 50%, who do not have enlarged glands, 15% will go on to develop cancer in this area.

It can be difficult to detect cancer in these glands by just feeling the groin. MRI and CT scans will only show glands that are enlarged. However, they can’t show if glands are enlarged due to infection or due to cancer. PET-CT can sometimes show tumour activity in glands that are not enlarged.

Therefore when treating penile cancer, success of the treatment depends not only on removing the cancer from the penis, but also on the diagnosis and treatment of cancerous lymph glands (if present). The treatment is removal of these glands by surgery.
Why do I need my surgery to my lymph glands?

There are various reasons as to why you need this surgery:

- When you had the cells taken from your glands in the groin, they were shown to contain cancer.
- The cancer of your penis had invaded into the deeper tissue, meaning there is a suspicion that it has spread further to the lymph glands.
- When the cancer from your penis was looked at under the microscope the cells were shown to be of a type that have a high chance of spread.

What does the surgery involve?

Again there are a number of possibilities. You may have the inguinal lymph nodes removed from both groins at one operation. This cut in each groin and the lymph nodes removed from both sides. They are then sent to the laboratory for examination under a microscope. If they contain cancerous cells you may have to come back in to hospital for an operation to remove the nodes which the cancer could spread to next, in the pelvis. It may be decided that you have the operations carried out in stages, or all at one time.

What will I be like after the operation?

When you return to the ward you will be asked to stay in bed, with your legs slightly elevated for approximately 3-4 days. You will have a catheter into your bladder to drain urine. You will also have small drains into your wound sites to drain away excess fluids from this area, and help prevent infection. The catheter will be removed when you are able to get out of bed to pass urine.

The wound drains will stay in place until they stop draining fluid.
Are there any side effects to this surgery?

There are complications and side effects associated with this surgery, and it is important that you discuss these fully before you have surgery.

**Wound problems.**

Unfortunately problems associated with these wounds are common. This is due to the fact that the wounds are in a place were they are difficult to heal, also important muscles, nerves and blood vessels run through this area, which can be disturbed during surgery. You could develop a collection of lymphatic fluid in the tissue beneath your wound, called a lymphocele. If this develops it may need to be drained with a small needle. You could also develop a wound infection. You will be given antibiotics to reduce the risk of this occurring. Occasionally, the tissue used to fill the gap from which the nodes were taken can break down requiring further surgery to repair this.

**Lymphoedema.**

When your lymph glands are removed from your groin, this will affect the normal drainage channels for lymph. The lymph can collect in tissue and not drain away. These results in a chronic swelling of the leg from were the lymph glands are removed. It can cause symptoms such as reduced movement of your joints, tightness of the skin and discomfort. Once lymphoedema has developed it can not be cured permanently, but it can be reduced and controlled. If you develop lymphoedema you can be referred to a specialist nurse who can give treatment, support and advice.

**Thrombosis.**

Due to the fact you are not very mobile there is a risk that you can develop a blood clot in your leg. You will be asked to wear special surgical stockings and prescribed a blood thinning injection to help prevent this.
How long will I be in hospital?
You will be in hospital for approximately 7 days, depending upon your postoperative recovery.

How do I look after my wound?
If you are in hospital the nursing staff will help you. You will be encouraged to have a daily bath or shower to keep the wound clean. Your sutures will be removed before you go home. If you do develop problems with your wound, this might delay your discharge, and you would possibly need a district nurse to visit you at home.

When do I get the results of my surgery?
You will be given an appointment to come to the outpatients department approximately 3 weeks after surgery. It may be an idea to bring your partner or a member of your family with you to the consultation, the reason for this being you will be given information about the results of your surgery and any further treatment. It is also a good idea to write down any questions that you have to discuss.

Who do I call if I am having difficulties?
Before being discharged from the ward you will be given the contact numbers of the ward and of the specialist nurses. You can also contact your GP or your district nurses.
Many thanks to the Wirral University Teaching hospital for allowing the NBT access to their information leaflet and permission to adapt it to their locality.

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at [www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution](http://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.

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How to contact us:

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Answerphone if in clinic

www.nbt.nhs.uk/urology

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