

Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy

What is a Sentinel lymph node biopsy?

A sentinel lymph node biopsy is a test to determine if breast cancer has spread to the lymph glands in the axilla (armpit).

The sentinel lymph node(s) are the first lymph nodes that cancer cells are likely to spread to in the axilla.

A sentinel lymph node biopsy is a procedure which involves the removal and examination of the sentinel lymph node. If the lymph node(s) are clear, the expectation is that the other lymph glands in the axilla will be clear.

Who is offered a Sentinel lymph node biopsy?

All patients with breast cancer are offered a procedure to determine whether the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes in axilla.

The possible procedures are:

- Removal of the sentinel nodes (sentinel node biopsy).
- Removal of 4 lymph nodes (Axillary sample).
- Removal of all lymph nodes (Axillary clearance).

How is a Sentinel lymph node biopsy performed?

There are two stages to the sentinel lymph node biopsy procedure.

Before your operation:

- On the morning before surgery a very small dose of a radioisotope tracer is injected just beside the nipple. (The radioisotope tracer is a substance which allows the route from the breast to the lymph nodes in the axilla to be identified).
- Later that day a scan may be performed to pinpoint the lymph nodes.

During your operation:

- A blue dye may be injected in the same area.
- A small incision is made in the lower part of the armpit.
- The sentinel lymph node(s) are identified using a probe which detects the radioisotope tracer and by the blue dye turning the glands blue.
- The sentinel lymph node(s) are removed and sent for analysis.

What do the results of the Sentinel lymph node biopsy mean?

Negative result

If the results are negative (the sentinel lymph node is clear) the expectation is that the remaining nodes are clear and no further surgery is required.

Positive result

If the results are positive (the sentinel node(s) contain cancer cells) a further operation or radiotherapy may be required.

What are the advantages of Sentinel lymph node biopsy?

A Sentinel lymph node biopsy is associated with fewer side effects than axillary clearance or sampling. This means that compared to the other procedures, Sentinel lymph node biopsy leads to:

- Less post-operative pain.
- Lower chance of infection.
- Lower chance of shoulder stiffness
- Lower chance of lymphoedema (arm swelling).
- No need for a normal drain.
- Shorter hospital stay.

What are the potential side effects of Sentinel lymph node biopsy?

Some patients may experience pain or bruising around the biopsy site. There is also a rare possibility of an allergic reaction to the blue dye used to find the Sentinel lymph node. Patients may also experience discoloured urine or staining to the skin by the dye. These side-effects are temporary.

Further Information

The information in this leaflet is of a general nature. Further individual information will be provided by your Surgeon and Breast Care Nurse.

Further information is also available from the following national and local support groups.

National Support Groups

www.breastcancercareorg.uk

www.breakthrough.org.uk

www.macmillan.org.uk

Local Support Groups

- The Sunshine Group
Breast Cancer Support
Aintree Hospitals
Liverpool

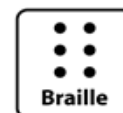
L9 7AL

Tel: 0151 529 0154

- Lyndale
Knowsley Cancer Support
40 Huyton Lane
Liverpool
L36 7XG
Helpline: 0151 489 3538
www.knowsley-cancer-support.co.uk

- Sefton Cancer Support Group
1 Duke Street
Formby
Merseyside
L37 4AL
24 Hour Helpline: 01704 876613
www.seftoncancersupport.org.uk

- Sunflowers
21 Aigburth Road
Liverpool
L17 4JR
Tel: 0151 726 8934
www.liverpoolsunflowers.com



If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

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