

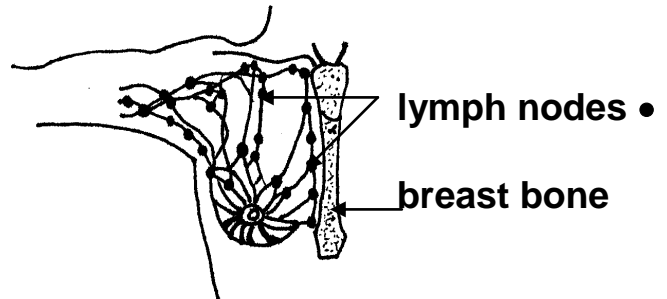
## Axillary Lymph Node Dissection

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### What is the lymph system and what are lymph nodes?

The lymph system is part of the immune system. It protects the body against diseases.

The lymph system is made up of ducts and nodes. Lymph nodes drain and filter such things as bacteria, viruses and tumour cells from the body.



Most lymph vessels from the breast drain into lymph nodes in the axilla or armpit. Other lymph vessels drain into the nodes behind the breastbone.

### What is an axillary lymph node dissection?

In most surgery for breast cancer, some of the lymph nodes in the axilla or armpit are removed. This type of surgery is called axillary node dissection. The lymph nodes are checked in the laboratory to see if the cancer cells have spread to the nodes. The results of this test help to decide if you need chemotherapy or hormone therapy after surgery.

### How will I feel after an axillary node dissection?

You will have an incision under your arm as well as your breast. This may be more painful than the incision on your breast because the movement of your arm pulls on the incision.

You may have a drainage tube in your incision. This is usually removed in 5 to 10 days.

You may have some numbness in your arm. Nerves being cut during surgery cause this. Normal feelings usually return to the arm, however, some numbness may never go away.

You can expect some pain, discomfort and stiffness in your shoulder. This will improve with pain control medication, time and exercise.

Rarely, some women have swelling in their arm and hand because there are fewer lymph nodes to drain lymph fluid. You can help reduce swelling in your arm by doing your exercises and elevating your arm often during the day.

## What activity can I do after?

### Activity

**It is important to start moving your arm the day after surgery.** Your surgeon or physiotherapist may show you the correct exercises to do after surgery.

### Incision care

You will have a small bandage covering the incision. Keep your incision clean and dry. You may shower the day after your biopsy.

Try not to get your incision too wet. Pat your incision dry after a shower. If you have a bandage on, change it after each shower.

The incision takes about 1 week to heal. You may see some bruising around the incision, which is normal.

## When should I see the surgeon again?

You should have a follow-up appointment with your surgeon in 1 to 2 weeks after your breast biopsy. Call for an appointment if you have not been given one. Your surgeon will check your breast and incision at this time. If you have stitches, they will be removed. You and your surgeon will talk about further follow-up after your biopsy at this appointment.

## Call your surgeon if you notice:

- You have pain or discomfort that gets worse.
- You have a lot of yellow or bloody drainage from any incision.
- You have a fever greater than 38°C or 100°F.
- You have a lot of swelling around any incision.

