

Breast Surgery: Mastectomy and sentinel lymph node (SLN) biopsy +/- axillary sampling/ clearance

Overview

You have been recommended to undergo a mastectomy and biopsy of lymph glands in the armpit (axilla) as the surgical treatment for your breast cancer. The operation usually lasts for about one and a half hours (or more) and involves an overnight stay in hospital.

This information leaflet explains some of the aims, benefits, risks and alternatives to this procedure. We want you to be informed about your choices to help you to be fully involved in making any decisions so please ask about anything you do not fully understand or wish to have explained in more detail.

If you would like this information in another format or language or would like help completing the form, please ask a member of our staff.

Please bring this form with you to hospital

Please read this form carefully and bring it back to the hospital on the day of your operation. You and your surgeon (or other appropriate healthcare professional) will sign it on the day to document your consent.

Remember, you can change your mind about having the procedure at any time.

For staff use only:

Does the patient have any special requirements? (eg requires an interpreter or other additional communication method)

About the procedure

Breast Side:.....

Mastectomy: This involves making incisions around the breast, removing most of the breast tissue, including the nipple and areola (dark skin around the nipple), and some of the breast skin, which leaves a scar that is flat against the chest wall.

Sentinel lymph node biopsy: This involves making a small incision in the armpit (axilla) and removing about one to four lymph nodes.

Lymph nodes ('glands') are concentrations of immune cells within the lymphatic system. Lymph draining from the tissues passes through them. Cancer cells can also escape from a tumour and lodge in lymph nodes. The information from the biopsy will help us plan the next stage of your treatment.

In the past, surgery involved removing most of these lymph nodes, even though we know that cancer cells affect lymph nodes in only a third of all patients. A new technique has recently been developed that allows us to examine the first lymph nodes that drain the breast and using this information, remove only the lymph nodes that are affected.

We call the first lymph nodes draining the breast, sentinel lymph nodes (SLNs). Several hours (usually between 2 to 24 hours) before your surgery, a small amount of radioactive tracer will be injected. Immediately before your operation and under general anaesthesia, blue dye will be injected around the areola (the pigmented area around the nipple). Both the radioactive tracer and the blue dye will help us to identify the SLNs during the operation, which are then removed, and sent to the pathology department for analysis.

Very rarely during the operation, it will be obvious by eye, that the SLNs are affected by cancer. If this is the case, we will remove the remaining lymph glands in your armpit. This is called axillary clearance.

In all other cases, we will do no further surgery to the armpit and will proceed to remove the cancer in the breast. After your operation, we will need to wait for the result of the detailed pathological analysis. This will show us whether the SLNs have cancer cells in them. If we find cancer cells in the SLNs, you will be offered a second operation to remove further lymph nodes in the armpit. This second operation will usually take place approximately two weeks after your pathology results are available.

Sometimes during the first operation we cannot identify the SLNs. This is for technical reasons - neither dye nor tracer has reached the lymph nodes in the armpit. This occurs in approximately 4 to 5 % of patients. If this happens, we will take a cautious route and remove 4-5 axillary nodes ie axillary sampling.

Before your procedure

You will be seen at the pre admission clinic by a member of the breast team prior to your admission date and you can discuss any concerns about the operation with the staff present. Details of your medical history will be obtained, clinical examination may be performed and any investigations deemed necessary would be requested.

If you are taking any tablets or other forms of medication, please bring a list of medications with you.

This procedure involves the use of general anaesthesia, which means you will not be conscious during the surgery. The anaesthetist will see you before the procedure to assess your state of health and discuss the details with you.

After the procedure

You will wake up in the recovery room after your operation. You might have an oxygen mask on your face to help you breathe. You might also wake up feeling sleepy.

While you are in the recovery room, a nurse will check your pulse and blood pressure regularly. When you are well enough to be moved, you will be taken to a ward. Sometimes, people feel sick

after a breast operation and might vomit. If you feel sick, please tell a nurse and you will be offered medicine to make you feel more comfortable.

You will have a small, plastic tube in one of the veins in your arm. This may be attached to a bag of fluid (called a drip), which feeds your body until you are well enough to eat and drink by yourself.

Eating and drinking: After the operation, you will be able to eat and drink when you are fully awake again. This usually takes two to four hours. How quickly you return to a normal diet will depend on how you feel. Most patients recover their appetite very quickly.

Getting up and about: Generally, it is best to get out of bed as soon as you feel you can. If, on the first day, you cannot get out of bed, you will be encouraged to move your legs in bed to prevent blood clots forming.

We will arrange for the physiotherapist to visit you on the ward to give advice and exercises.

We advise you to bring a supportive and well-fitting bra into the ward with you. This may be put on after your surgery, providing support and comfort to the wound. The ward staff will advise you when to put the bra on.

Special measures you need to take AFTER the procedure: You will be given more detailed information about any special measures you need to take after the procedure. You will also be given information about things to watch out for that might be early signs of complications (e.g. infection).

Experienced staff are available to help you. Please tell your nurses or doctors about any concerns that you have, they will try to help you resolve them.

You will be informed if the skin stitches need to be removed. You will have a light dressing covering your wound to keep it clean, and this will usually be in place for the first day or so. The wound may be secured with steri-strips which are like small pieces of tape. They help healing and support the wound. These will gradually come off in the bath or the shower.

When you can leave hospital: The time that you stay in hospital will depend on how you are feeling after your operation, the type of operation, and your doctor's opinion.

Before you leave the ward, you will be given two temporary prostheses 'comfies'. You will be contacted about arrangements for being fitted with longer term prosthesis. The fitting will be about six to eight weeks after your operation and the service is provided free of charge.

When you can resume normal activities including work: You can usually begin gentle work within a week or two, but you might need to wait a little longer for more vigorous activity. It is not uncommon to feel a bit 'down' after any operation, so do ask your doctor or breast care nurse if you feel you need more psychological support.

Check-ups and results: You will be given a date to return to clinic for the results of your surgery. By then the tissue removed at the operation will have been examined and your results discussed by the breast care team. Any further treatment, if recommended, will be discussed

with you then. If you do not receive this follow-up appointment (within a week of discharge), please contact the breast care nurse.

Alternative procedures that are available

Other forms of treatment may be utilised in the treatment of your cancer such as radiation therapy (using high-dose x-rays to kill cancer cells), chemotherapy (using drugs to kill cancer cells), and hormone therapy (using hormones to stop the cells from growing). However, the present recommendation by the breast team is that in your case, surgery is the best form of treatment at this stage.

Serious or frequently occurring risks

All operations have a small risk of side effects, such as pain, bleeding and infection. The risks associated with general anaesthesia include potential breathing and heart problems, as well as possible reactions to medications. For a woman who is otherwise in good health, the risk of a serious complication due to general anaesthesia is less than 1%.

Mastectomy: You may have tingly feelings or shooting pain where the breast was removed, this can last for six or more months. Additionally, some women notice a change in their balance due to loss of the breast weight. Wearing a prosthesis can help with this problem.

Sentinel node biopsy: Research has suggested that there is a small possibility that; when we remove only one or two nodes, an occasional node which contains cancer cells may be left behind. This occurs in less than 5% of all patients who have diseased lymph glands in the armpit.

We do not anticipate any risks or side effects from the low-dose radioactive tracer because the total amount of radiation you receive is less than what you would receive from the environment over a three month period.

The blue dye itself is not known to be harmful. You might however, notice some blue discoloration of your urine for a few days after the operations. Mild allergic reactions to the dye can occur in 1.8% of patient. More severe allergic reactions are rare and can occur in 0.2% of patients.

Axillary clearance: If it has been necessary to proceed to axillary clearance, you may experience numbness and discomfort in the armpit and upper arm, as well as shoulder stiffness. The numbness usually lessens slowly, after treatment, but might not resolve completely. Performing shoulder exercises (taught to you after the operation) improves mobility.

Seroma: Seroma is a collection of fluid under the arm after surgery. This fluid may need to be drained through a needle. Draining is a very simple procedure that can be done by a member of the breast team.

Lymphoedema: Lymphoedema is a swelling in the tissue below the skin caused by lymph fluid which cannot drain away. This can occur when the lymph glands are removed (by surgery) or blocked (by radiotherapy) secondary to scar tissue formation. The hand and or arm may swell at any time after the surgery. It can affect about 15 to 20% of women but only around 5% to a

significant degree. There are certain precautions you need to take to prevent lymphoedema, these will be discussed with you by the breast care nurse.

Information and support

Additional information will be given to you in the form of a patient information breast care pack. Do feel free to speak to a member of staff if you have any questions or anxieties.

Useful Contacts

Breast Care Nurses:

Bridget Ashdown
01234 792057
Bridget.Ashdown@bedfordhospital.nhs.uk

Rachel Bryce
01234 792057
Rachel.Bryce@bedfordhospital.nhs.uk

Alison Borromeo
01234 355 122 ext. 5268
Alison.Borromeo@bedfordhospital.nhs.uk

Cancer BACUP: 0808 800 1234
Breast Cancer Care: 0808 800 6000

Consent form

Consultant:

Name of proposed procedure:

Mastectomy and sentinel lymph node (SLN) biopsy +/- axillary sampling/ clearance **Side:** (left/right).....

For staff use only:
Surname:
First names:
Date of birth:
Hospital no:
Male/Female:
(Use hospital identification label)

Statement of health professional

(To be filled in by a health professional with an **appropriate knowledge of the proposed procedure**, as specified in the hospital's consent policy)

I have explained the procedure to the patient. In particular, I have explained:

- How it will be performed
- The intended benefits of the procedure
- Any serious or frequently occurring risks including those specific to the patient: **infection, bleeding, seroma, lymphoedema, shoulder stiffness, numbness under arm, blue discolouration of breast, allergy to dye.**
- Any extra procedures that might become necessary during the procedure

Blood transfusion Other procedure (please specify)

I have discussed what the treatment / procedure is likely to involve, the benefits and risks of any available alternative treatments (including no treatment) and any particular concerns of this patient.

The following information leaflet has been provided:.....Version/Date/Ref:

This procedure will involve:

General and/or regional anaesthesia Local anaesthesia Sedation

Health professional's signature

Date:

Name (PRINT):

Job title:

Contact details (if patient wishes to discuss details later).....

I have offered the patient information about the procedure but s/he has declined information.

Important notes: (tick if applicable)

- The patient has withdrawn consent (ask patient to sign/date here)
- See also advance directive/living will (eg Jehovah's Witness form)

Statement of the interpreter (if appropriate)

I have interpreted the information to the best of my ability, and in a way in which I believe s/he can understand:

Interpreter's signature:

Date:

Name (PRINT):

Copy accepted by patient: yes / no (please circle)

For staff use only:
Surname:
First names:
Date of birth:
Hospital no:
Male/Female:
(Use hospital identification label)

Statement of patient

Please read this form carefully. If your treatment has been planned in advance, you should already have your own copy, which described the benefits and risks of the proposed treatment. If not, you will be offered a copy now. Do ask if you have any further questions - we are here to help you. **You have the right to change your mind at any time, including after you have signed this form.**

Training doctors and other health professionals is essential to the continuation of the health service and improving the quality of care. Your treatment may provide an important opportunity for such training, where necessary under the careful supervision of a senior doctor. You may, however, decline to be involved in the formal training of medical and other students without this adversely affecting your care and treatment.

Please tick boxes to indicate you understand and either agree/disagree to the statements below.

	Yes	No
I agree to the procedure (or course of treatment) described on this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that you cannot give me a guarantee that a particular person will perform the procedure. The person will, however, have appropriate experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that any tissue (including blood) removed as part of the procedure or treatment may be used for diagnosis and audit, stored or disposed of as appropriate and in a manner regulated by appropriate, ethical, legal and professional standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that tissue (including blood) not needed for my own diagnosis or treatment can be used for the following purposes that could benefit other patients: Teaching Research which may include genetic research	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that all research will be approved by a research ethics committee and undertaken in accordance with appropriate ethical, legal and professional standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the research may be conducted within a hospital, university, not for profit organisation or a company laboratory.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the use of photography for the purpose of diagnosis and treatment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to anonymised photographs being used for medical teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
I understand that I will have the opportunity to discuss the details of anaesthesia with an anaesthetist before the procedure, unless the urgency of my situation prevents this. (This only applies to patients having general or regional anaesthesia.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I understand that any procedure in addition to those described on this form will only be carried out if it is necessary to save my life or to prevent serious harm to my health.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have been told about additional procedures which may become necessary during my treatment. I have listed below any procedures that I do not wish, without further discussion, to be carried out.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Patient's own signature:

Date

Name (PRINT):

If the patient is unable to sign but has indicated his/her consent, a witness should sign below. Young people may also like a parent to sign here (see guidance notes).

Witness's own signature:

Date:

Name (PRINT):

Confirmation of consent (to be completed by a health professional when the patient is admitted for the procedure, if the patient has signed the form in advance)

On behalf of the team treating the patient, I have confirmed with the patient that s/he has no further questions and wishes the procedure to go ahead.

Signature:

Date:

Name (PRINT):

Role:

Adapted with kind permission from Addenbrooke's Hospital