

Axillary lymph node biopsy

Sýnataka frá eitli úr holhönd

A lymph node is removed from the armpit in a surgical procedure. The operation is performed under local or general anesthesia and the patient is usually discharged from the hospital on the same day.

Preparations for surgery

Anticoagulants

If treatment with anticoagulants needs to be altered or stopped before the surgery, it is done in consultation with the surgeon.

Natural and food supplements

It is advised to stop using all natural and food supplements two weeks before the operation, as they can increase the risk of bleeding during the operation and affect the efficacy of medicines that are used during anesthesia. It is safe to continue taking multivitamins and minerals.

Shaving of the armpit

Armpit hair may not be shaved off during the last three days before the operation due to risk of infection.

Telephone conversation regarding anesthesia

The nurse anesthetist will phone the patient a few days before the operation to review the patient's health with regard to the anesthesia, and to give the patient the opportunity to ask questions. If anything is unclear or further examination is required, there will be a preoperative interview at the hospital before the operation takes place. It is good to have a list of medicines ready, as information about what medicines may be taken before the operation will be provided during the telephone conversation. Certain medicines should not be taken before anesthesia. If any problems have occurred after previous administration of anesthesia, such as severe pain, nausea or vomiting, it is important to report them.

The telephone conversation will include questions about:

- Previous experience with general or local anesthesia
- Allergies or intolerance to medicine
- Height and weight
- Alcohol consumption and smoking
- Dentures and bridgework
- Health and diseases
- Use of medicines, including natural and food supplements

The evening before the operation

Fasting

Fasting is necessary before the operation to reduce the risk of complications in connection with the general or local anesthesia. However, fasting for long periods of time is not good for the body and the patient will feel better after the operation if the following instructions are followed:

- Grab an extra bite or drink before going to bed the night before the operation.
- Do not eat food during the last 6 hours prior to arrival at the hospital.
- It is safe to consume clear drinks (1-2 glasses at a time) until 2 hours before arrival at the hospital. Clear drinks include water, clear fruit juice, and coffee and tea without milk.
- Upon arrival at the hospital, staff will provide information about whether and for how long liquids may be drunk before the operation.
- Tobacco may not be used during the last 2 hours before arrival at the hospital.

Assistance with returning home

Arrangements must be made for assistance with returning home, as it is not permitted to drive a car until the day after the general or local anesthesia. For safety reasons it is also necessary to have someone present during the first night after the operation.

Other preparations

It is a good idea to bring comfortable clothes and some entertainment upon admission to the ward. Mobile phones may be used, but must be set to silent ringing.

Operation day

Shower

It is necessary to shower before arrival at the hospital. You must put on clean clothes after showering and you cannot use deodorants, lotions, makeup, perfumes, nail polish or jewelry.

You are to arrive at the department indicated in the pre-operative phone consultation. You must bring with you all medicines that you take on a daily basis. Patients may not take their own medicines without consulting with the doctor or nurse.

Before the operation takes place, a written consent for the operation and the anesthesia must be provided. Unexpected circumstances may cause the operation to be rescheduled. To ensure safety, questions about important matters, such as the patient's name, identification number (kennitala), allergies, fasting and type of operation, are asked repeatedly. Upon arrival in the operating room further preparations are made for the operation. An intravascular catheter is inserted in the back of the hand or in the arm, and is used to administer liquid and medicine. The operation is performed under local or general anesthesia, and usually takes 30-40 minutes.

After the operation

The patient is moved to the recovery ward after the operation. It is important to report any pain or nausea that might occur so that appropriate measures can be taken. It is natural to experience fatigue and drowsiness at first.

You may experience a sore throat after the anesthesia, and this will usually ease up in 1-2 days. We offer a light meal before the trip home.

Urination

Difficulties with urination may occur after anesthesia, and therefore it is important to try to urinate soon after arrival at the ward. It must be reported if you are unable to urinate or only a small amount of urine is expelled.

Discharge

It is estimated that patients will be discharged about 2-4 hours after the operation but in rare cases they must stay overnight in the hospital.

The following must be provided before discharge:

- Discharge information
- A prescription for pain medicine, if required

Discharge information

Pain

The incision site might be sore during the first few days after the operation. It is important to reduce pain as much as possible. If pain persists it is desirable to take pain medication at regular intervals over the day in accordance with instructions. Use of the medication is gradually reduced by lowering the doses or taking the medicine less frequently.

After the operation the sensation in the inner upper arm may be altered, but this usually returns to normal.

Surgical wounds

- Surgical wounds are closed with sutures that dissolve.
- The outer dressing is waterproof and may be removed 3-4 days after the operation. Underneath are small adhesive plasters that may not be removed until they naturally detach from the skin.
- The appearance of the surgical wound must be monitored with regard to redness, swelling and secretion. A mirror can be used to examine the surgical wounds, but take care to avoid unnecessarily touching them.
- It is safe to shower 24 hours after the operation.
- It is not advisable to bathe in a tub or go swimming for two weeks after the operation while the wound is healing.
- Surgical wounds are sensitive to strong sunlight for up to 12 months after the operation.
- Use of deodorant shall be avoided for two weeks after the operation

Food and drink

Consumption of food may be resumed as before.

Physical exercise

Heavy lifting should be avoided for about two weeks after the operation, or as instructed by the doctor.

Work

Work may begin in consultation with the doctor.

Cost

The operation must be paid for in the daytime ward. The amount is in accordance with Landspítali's tariff.

The Landspítali Breast Centre must be contacted during daytime working hours if the following signs of danger are detected in the first two weeks after the operation:

- Pain is not relieved by pain medicine
- Fever higher than 38.5°C
- Redness, swelling or pus appears at the surgical wound
- Persistent nausea and vomiting

In emergencies or outside daytime working hours, contact the emergency ward

Telephone numbers

Day surgery ward 13D	543 7480
Breast Centre, open on weekdays between the hours of 08:00-15:30	543 9560
The Landspítali switchboard is open 24 hours a day	543 1000

Patients and their family members are welcome to call should questions arise.

This educational material is provided for patients at Landspítali and their families, and is based on the best information available at the time of publication. The purpose of this publication is to support the professional advice of Landspítali's medical staff, who will provide further information as needed. This material is not intended to replace personal guidance from medical staff.