

# Information for patients

## Radial neck dissection

### What is a radical neck dissection?

A radical neck dissection is an operation where the lymph nodes of the neck containing cancer and some of the healthy ones that surround them are removed. This can be done on one or both sides of the neck.

### What happens before my surgery?

Before surgery, some patients attend a pre-admission clinic where the doctor will explain the surgery and you will sign a consent form.

At the clinic, the health care team will ask you about your health, medication and lifestyle. They may test your blood, take x-rays and an electrocardiogram (ECG).

Your doctor will talk to you about what medications to take before you come to hospital.

It is important to tell your doctor if you are taking any blood thinning medications, such as aspirin, warfarin or clopidogrel (Plavix).

Please bring your medications into hospital with you.

If you use a dosette box or pill organiser to take your tablets, please ask your pharmacist to print out a list of your current medications so you can bring this to hospital.

If you do not need to attend the pre-admission clinic, we will telephone you to tell you when your surgery is scheduled and what to bring to hospital. You may also receive a letter informing you of your time and date of surgery. Please make sure you confirm your date for surgery.

The day before your surgery, the hospital will call you between 2.30pm and 7pm to inform you of the time you need to stop eating and drinking and what time to come to hospital.

### What happens on the day of my surgery?

We ask that you shower before you come into hospital and remove jewellery, make up, nail polish and fake nails. It is advised that you leave valuables such as jewellery and large sums of money at home

to decrease the possibility of items being misplaced or stolen.

On the day of your surgery please make your way to the St Vincent's Day of Surgery Admission (DOSA) area, which is located on the first floor of the In-patient Services Building, Princes Street, Fitzroy.

When you arrive the nursing staff will check your pulse and blood pressure.

You will need an anaesthetic for your surgery. The anaesthetist (the doctor who will give you the anaesthetic) will meet with you before your surgery to talk to you about your health and the best type of anaesthetic for you.

A general anaesthetic (anaesthetic to put you to sleep) is normally used for this procedure.

St Vincent's is a busy hospital so please be aware that you may need to wait up to three hours for your operation.

### What happens during the surgery?

A cut is made in the side of your neck so that the surgeon can locate and remove the lymph nodes.

The lymph nodes are then sent to pathology for testing. You will be contacted when the surgeon receives the pathology results. It may take several days for the results to become available.

### What happens after my surgery?

You will wake up from the anaesthetic in the recovery room and be transferred to your ward shortly after. A nurse will monitor your blood pressure, pulse, temperature and oxygen levels regularly.

You may have an oxygen mask on to help you breathe and an intravenous (IV) drip in your arm to give you fluids until you are able to eat and drink.

You may also have a catheter in your bladder to monitor your urine output.

You will have a dressing over your neck wound and you may also have a drain tube in your neck to drain away any excess fluid and reduce swelling.

Your pain may be treated in a number of ways. This will be decided by you, your doctors and nurses depending on the type of pain you have. You may be given tablets or an injection to help you feel better.

You will remain resting in bed for the first few hours after your operation, then the nurses will assist you to sit out of bed for short periods. Whilst you are in bed, it is important to avoid crossing your legs and to move them regularly.

### **When can I go home?**

Most people stay in hospital for four to seven days for this type of surgery. Patients are usually discharged at 10am so the room can be prepared for another patient.

Before you leave the ward someone will:

- make a follow-up appointment at St Vincent's Specialist Clinics for you
- send a letter to your local doctor (GP)
- give you medication, if the doctor prescribes it
- give you a medical certificate if needed (you will need to ask).

Please remember to take all your belongings including x-rays home with you.

### **What should I do once I get home?**

Your doctor may recommend a further two weeks off work after the operation to give your body the best chance of recovery

You should avoid doing any strenuous activity, especially lifting anything heavy. Do not lift anything more than 2-3kg for two weeks after surgery (this equals the weight of a bag of oranges).

Get plenty of rest as you may feel tired after your hospital stay. You will be able to get dressed independently and should slowly increase your level of activity each day.

Smoking is not recommended.

You are able to shower and get your neck wound wet. Pat dry with a clean towel.

If you experience difficulty breathing, notice bleeding, ooze or redness from your neck wound or have any problems associated with your surgery, go to the nearest emergency department or your local GP as soon as possible.

### **Contacts**

#### **Coordinator Head and Neck Cancer Multidisciplinary Clinic and Liaison Nurse**

Tel: 9288 2755

#### **Waiting List Officer**

Tel: 9288 2271

This information sheet is intended as a guideline only. If you have further questions or concerns, please speak to your doctor.