

If you experience any problems related to your surgery or admission once you have been discharged home. Please feel free to contact 4A, 4B or 4C ward for advice from the nurse in charge. They will assist you via the telephone, advise you return to your GP or ask you to make your way to the ED department at Whiston Hospital depending upon the nature of your concern.

4A Ward – 0151 430 1420

4B Ward – 0151 430 1637

4B Ward – 0151 430 1643

Students

There may be students present during your consultation as part of their on-going training. Please let the staff know if you wish to be seen by a doctor only.

Whiston Hospital
Warrington Road,
Prescot, Merseyside, L35 5DR
Telephone: 0151 426 1600



www.sthk.nhs.uk

Axillary Clearance Information

This leaflet can be made available
in alternative languages / formats on request.

如有需要，本传单可提供其他语言/版式
此單張的其他語言/格式版本可按要求提供

Na żądanie ta ulotka może zostać udostępniona
w innych językach/formatach.

Author: Surgical Care Team
Department: General Surgery
Document Number: STHK1020
Version: 2
Review date: 07/06/2021

About axillary clearance

You have been recommended an axillary clearance as the surgical treatment for your breast cancer. Under general anaesthetic, lymph glands under the arm (axilla) are removed. The operation usually lasts up to one to two hours and requires a short hospital stay.

Intended benefits

To remove the cancer in the axillary glands as far as surgically possible and to plan the next stage of your treatment. To help prevent recurrence of the cancer and improve your outcome.

Who will perform my procedure?

This procedure will be performed by a breast surgeon who is a member of the breast team.

Before your procedure

You may attend a pre-admission clinic, when you will meet a member of the team. At this clinic, we will ask for details of your medical history and carry out any necessary clinical examinations and investigations.

Please ask us any questions about the procedure, and feel free to discuss any concerns you might have at any time.

Shoulder stiffness:

The shoulder may become stiff and painful after your operation. Performing shoulder exercises (taught to you after the operation) improves mobility.

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.

Surgery

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%.

Check ups and results

We will give you an outpatients appointment for approximately two weeks after your procedure for the results of your surgery. By then we will have examined the tissue removed at the operation and the Breast Care Team will have discussed your results. If any further treatment is recommended, we will discuss it with you at this appointment.

Significant, unavoidable or frequently occurring risks of this procedure

Seroma

Is a collection of fluid under the arm after surgery. It is relatively common after axillary clearance, but is easily treated by drainage through a small needle. Draining is a very simple procedure that can be done by a member of the Breast Team.

Numbness

You may experience numbness and discomfort in the armpit and upper arm. The numbness usually lessens slowly, after treatment, but might not resolve completely.

We will ask if you take any tablets or use any other types of medication either prescribed by a doctor or bought over the counter in a pharmacy. Please bring any packaging with you. This procedure involves the use of anaesthesia. You will see an anaesthetist before your procedure. You will normally be admitted to hospital on the day of surgery.

During the procedure

At the start of your procedure, you will be given the necessary anaesthetic he lymph glands under the arm drain a large area of the lymphatic fluid from the breast and arm, and sometimes the tumour can spread to the lymph glands. The procedure involves the removal of the majority of these glands. This will reduce the possibility of a recurrence of the tumour under the arm as well as informing us whether the glands are affected by the tumour, which helps us plan the next stage of your treatment .

After the procedure

Once your surgery is completed you will usually be transferred to the recovery ward where you will be looked after by specially trained nurses, under the direction of your anaesthetist. The nurses will monitor you closely until the effects of any general anaesthetic have adequately worn off and you are conscious.

They will monitor your heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen levels too. You may be given oxygen via a facemask, fluids via your drip and appropriate pain relief until you are comfortable enough to return to your ward.

Sometimes, people feel sick after an operation, especially after a general anaesthetic. If you feel sick, please tell a nurse and you will be offered medicine to make you feel more comfortable. When you wake up, you may have a drain (plastic tube) coming from your wound.

After the operation

you will be able to eat and drink when you are 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 about after the procedure

We will help you to become mobile as soon as possible after the procedure. This helps improve your recovery and reduces the risk of certain complications. We will arrange for the physiotherapist to visit you on the ward to give advice and exercises .

Leaving Hospital

You may be able to go home the day of your operation or the day after your operation if you feel well enough.

Resuming normal activities and returning to work

You can usually begin gentle work within a day 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.

Special Measures after the procedures

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. The skin stitches are dissolvable and will not 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 to heal and support the wound.

These will gradually come off in the bath or the shower .