

Care after your groin lymph node surgery

This handout is to help you learn how to care for yourself and recover from your groin lymph node surgery.

Swelling and tenderness

After surgery you will have some swelling and tenderness in the groin/vulvar area that will go down with time. This can cause feelings of numbness or tingling from irritation of nerves in this area.

Drains

You may have drains in one or both of your upper thighs. This is to drain the fluid that may be in the tissues after the lymph nodes from that area have been removed. The remaining lymph nodes will take over and drain this fluid, but this may take a few weeks to months to happen.

The drains are usually removed by the home care nurse according to instructions from the surgeon such as when they drain less than 30 mL in a 24-hour period, or 7 to 10 days after surgery. The fluid in the drainage bottle may vary in colour from red to a clear yellow. Be careful not to pull on these drains, as it may cause pain and may cause the drains to fall out.

Incisions

You will have staples along the incisions in the groin areas. These will usually come out in 7 to 10 days. This may be done at your family doctor's office or by a home care nurse.

Be sure to keep the incisions clean. You may have a shower with the drains in place, but be sure to use a clean face cloth and towel each time you bathe and dry the groin areas well.

What to watch for after surgery:

- **Signs of infection**
These include redness, bad odour, increased tenderness and/or fever or any cuts, bruises or insect bites that do not heal normally. **If you have these symptoms please let your home care nurse know or call your oncologist.** You may need medication to help clear the infection.
- **Leg swelling**
If you have swelling of your legs, try to raise them as much as you can. **If the swelling becomes an ongoing problem, please call your oncologist/nurse. Treating swelling early is a good idea to help prevent lymphedema problems.**

Caring for your legs

It will be very important to be careful with your leg(s) now that the lymph nodes have been removed. Try to avoid infections and if you have any redness or swelling, call your oncologist. **Lymphedema or swelling of the leg after lymph node surgery is a life time risk.**

Tips to help you care for your leg(s):

- Use insect repellent when outside to prevent insect bites.
- Wash all cuts and scrapes with soap and water and apply an antibacterial ointment such as Polysporin. **Do not put the Polysporin on the incisions.**
- Wear comfortable shoes that protect your feet.
- Be careful not to get your legs or groin sunburned. Wear at least a 30 SPF sunscreen.
- Use an electric razor to prevent nick and cuts.
- Do not wear tight socks that might block the blood flow to your legs.
- Do gentle leg exercises and deep breathing to help move lymph fluid around your body.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.

For more information on lymphedema, and leg exercises go to the following websites:

- www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/
Click on the Patient Education tab and then search for Lymphedema
- Canadian Cancer Society: www.cancer.ca

If you have any further concerns, you may contact:

Dr. _____

Nurse(s): _____

at 905-387-9495