

Procedure: Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy

Procedure Information:

A sentinel lymph node biopsy is done to determine if the cancer has spread out of the breast. During a sentinel lymph node biopsy, the surgeon will remove a limited number of lymph nodes under your armpit called the sentinel lymph nodes. The sentinel lymph nodes are the first lymph nodes that receive the lymph drainage from your tumor. Cancer can spread through this lymph drainage. If no cancer is found in these first lymph nodes, the chance of finding cancer in any of the other remaining lymph nodes is small and no other nodes need to be removed.

At the time of your surgery, the surgeon will inject two things into the breast in order to find the first lymph nodes that receive the lymph drainage from your tumor:

1. Blue dye – you may notice some blue discoloration on your breast and in your urine after surgery, this is normal and will go away on its own
2. Technetium – a safe and weakly radioactive substance

The surgeon can find the sentinel lymph nodes by looking to see which lymph nodes turn blue under the armpit and by using a device to detect the radioactivity under your armpit. Once the sentinel lymph nodes are located, the surgeon will make a small incision in your armpit to remove these. Often there are 2-3 sentinel lymph nodes that are completely removed.

The sentinel lymph nodes are then checked for the presence of cancer cells by a pathologist. This is done after surgery. We will call you within 3 business days with the results.

Incision care:

The incision in your armpit is often more tender than the incision on your breast

1. You can remove the dressing over your incision 48 hours after surgery, you do not need to put another dressing on after this. Under the gauze dressing, you may find several Steri-Strips. Do not remove them. If you believe the Steri-Strips are causing skin irritation please call us
2. You can shower and let soapy water run over the incision after you remove the dressing, you do not need to scrub the area
3. Please let the Steri-Strips that are over your incision fall off on their own
4. Please do not put any creams, ointments, or antibiotic creams on the incision
5. No shaving under the armpit for two weeks

Pain:

1. Ice packs to the area may help (20 minutes on and 20 off)
2. You may take over the counter pain relievers as directed on the bottle. Do not take these if you have been instructed not to by another doctor
3. You will be given a prescription for pain medication by your surgeon for more severe pain if you need it and if the over the counter medications are not helping

What to expect:

1. Slight discomfort and a small amount of swelling around the incision are normal
2. It is normal to experience discomfort or tingling to your upper, inner arm

Please call us at (715) 847-2022 if you have...

- Uncontrolled or severe pain
- Increasing swelling
- Intense warmth and/or redness on the skin
- Drainage or bleeding that is soaking through your bandage. If you bleed bright red blood hold clean gauze and pressure over the wound and call immediately. It is normal to have a small amount of dark or dried blood on the dressing or steri strips
- Fever of 100.4 degrees or higher

***If you experience any chest pain, shortness of breath, or pain to your lower legs/calf muscles please go directly to the Emergency Room**