Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Caring for Yourself After Your Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy

This information will help you care for yourself after your sentinel lymph node biopsy at MSK.

You may have had a sentinel lymph node biopsy if you have breast cancer or melanoma. It allows your doctor to see if the cancer cells have spread to your lymph nodes.

## After your procedure

Your incision (surgical cut) will be closed with Steri-Strips™ (thin strips of paper tape) or Dermabond® (surgical glue) and covered with a bandage.

- If your incision is covered with Steri-Strips, leave them on until they fall off on their own. If they haven't fallen off after 14 days, you may gently remove them.
- If your incision is covered with Dermabond, don't remove the glue. The Dermabond will peel off on its own.

Your incision may feel tender and sore. You may also notice numbness and tingling along your incision as it heals. This can come and go. It can last from a week to more than several months. These sensations happen as your nerves heal. They're normal and will go away with time.

You may feel scar tissue along your incision as you continue to heal. It will feel hard. This is common and will soften over the next several months.

You may have a bluish-green stain near your incision from the blue dye that was used to find your sentinel node(s). The color will fade over time. Some people

may have a faint stain for up to 12 months after their biopsy.

Your urine and stool may also be a bluish-green color. This will go away in 1 to 2 days, when the dye is out of your body.

# At home

## Managing pain

You will have some soreness or pain in the area near your incision. Take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) to help.

Your doctor may give you a prescription for stronger pain medication. If so, take the medication as instructed by your doctor or nurse. Don't drink alcohol or drive while you are taking prescription pain medication.

## Showering

You can shower 24 hours after your biopsy.

Before showering, remove the bandage that was on your incision. You don't need to put another bandage on after your shower.

## Clothing

If you had breast surgery, we recommend that you wear a supportive bra (such as a sports bra) or a wrap for 72 hours after your biopsy. It will support and compress the area near the incision and make you more comfortable.

We suggest wearing the bra or wrap even while sleeping. You may remove your bra or wrap when you bathe or shower.

## Activities

After your biopsy, you may have some stiffness or pain, in your arm or leg on your affected side (the side where your lymph nodes were removed). If you still have stiffness or pain 6 weeks after your procedure, call your doctor.

If you had breast surgery, your nurse will give you the resource titled *Exercises After Your Lumpectomy or Axillary Lymph Node Procedure*

(www.mskcc.org/pe/exercises-lumpectomy-axillary-procedure). These exercises will help with the stiffness.

You may return to most normal activities the day after your biopsy. However, speak with your doctor or nurse before resuming heavy exercises, such as:

- Running
- Jogging
- Lifting weights

# Emotional support

Cancer diagnosis and treatment can be a very stressful and overwhelming event. You may feel depressed, anxious, confused, afraid, or angry. You may have strong feelings about any permanent changes. These changes can have an impact on your emotional well-being. Help is available for you at any time. If you would like counseling, your nurse can refer you to see a social worker, psychiatrist, or counselor.

The MSK Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC) Program provides support services after your treatment is finished. To learn more about these services, call 646-888-8106.

# Call your healthcare provider if you have:

- Increased redness around your incision
- New or increased swelling around your incision
- Drainage from the incision line
- Warmer than normal skin around your incision
- A fever above 101 °F (38.3 °C)

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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