

# Lymph Node Dissection: Self-Care at Home

After a lymph node dissection, you'll need to take it easy and give yourself time to heal.

Here are some things you can do to help yourself get better.

For the first few days after surgery, you'll probably feel weak, and your shoulder may feel sore and stiff.

Rest when you need to ... and get enough sleep.

To prevent swelling, prop your arm up above the level of your heart anytime you sit or lie down.

You'll get a prescription for pain medicine ... and maybe an antibiotic.

Take your medicines exactly as directed.

Tell your care provider if you have any problems with them.

It's not safe to drive while you're taking pain medicine.

Your doctor can tell you when you can start driving again.

You may have one or two tubes ... called drains ... under the affected arm.

They collect fluid.

You'll get instructions on how to take care of your drains and your cuts ... your incisions.

You'll need to keep the incisions clean and dry ...

so ask your care provider when it's okay to take a shower or bath.

Now, after your lymph nodes are removed, you'll have a higher risk of swelling in the affected arm.

The swelling is called lymphedema.

You'll get instructions on how to prevent swelling and infection, including gentle arm exercises to do.

While you're recovering, you'll need to be careful with your arm, so ...

don't lift anything heavy ... like a vacuum cleaner, a heavy bag of any kind, or a child.

And don't do any hard exercise or any chores that use the affected arm.

But do keep moving.

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Walking can help prevent blood clots and other problems, like constipation.

So try to walk a little more each day.

Now, as you're healing, watch for problems ...

and call your care provider if you have any signs of infection or lymphedema.

Signs of infection include ...

increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness ...

red streaks leading from the incision ...

pus draining from the incision ...

or a fever.

Signs of lymphedema include ...

swelling in your arm or hand ...

pain ...

weakness that keeps getting worse ...

or tingling ...

a feeling that your arm is full or heavy ...

clothes or jewelry that seem tight ...

or stiffness in your hand or wrist.

Now ... this may seem like a lot to do ... but all of these things are important ...

because they can help you heal and stay out of the hospital.