



Penile Cancer information sheet

Lymph node dissection

For further information on life after treatment,
please refer to Orchid's main booklet:
Penile Cancer; What you need to know.

Orchid is dedicated to supporting men with a diagnosis of penile cancer. This information sheet describes a particular treatment men may have along with any special care and tips we think may be helpful.



Orchid has a
Male Cancer Helpline

manned by specialist nurses on

0808 802 0010

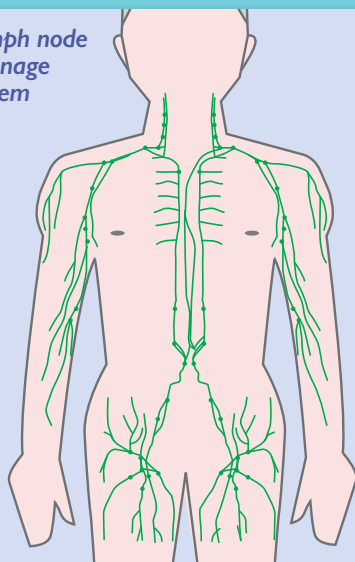
or email

helpline@orchid-cancer.org.uk

What are lymph nodes?

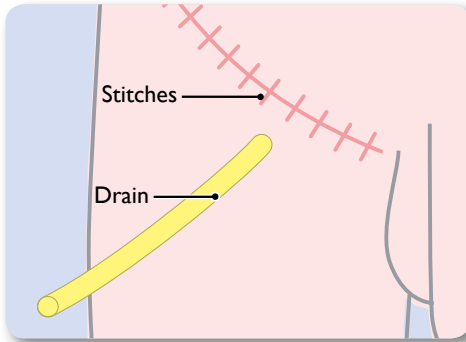
The human body is covered by a special type of drainage system called the lymphatic drainage system (see diagram). This system is responsible for transporting excess fluid from the organs and tissues of the body as a fluid called lymph. Lymph fluid will contain various types of cells and substances that are no longer needed. The lymph fluid will pass through small nodules or nodes that act as filters removing these substances. Cancer cells can also travel in the lymph fluid and as a result may affect other areas of the body.

*Lymph node
drainage
system*



Inguinal (groin) lymph node dissection

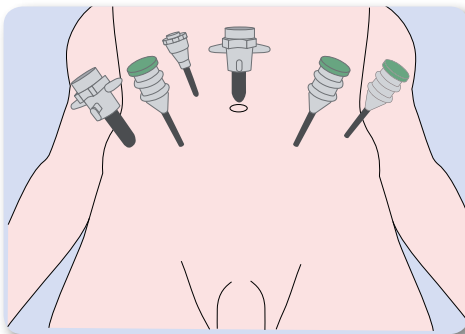
This is an operation to remove lymph nodes from one or both sides of the groin if they contain cancer. These are called inguinal lymph nodes. It is performed under a general anaesthetic and will typically take 2 - 3 hours to complete. An incision into the groin is made and the lymph nodes are removed (see below).



Pelvic lymph node dissection

If lymph nodes above the inguinal nodes (pelvic lymph nodes) have been affected by cancer a further operation may be recommended to remove them.

This operation is similar to inguinal lymph node removal. Both can be performed using laparoscopic (keyhole surgery; see picture below).



After surgery

- ▶ Painkillers will be given on a regular basis. It is important that painkillers are taken regularly as prescribed and not just when pain is felt.
- ▶ Excess blood or fluid can sometimes gather at the operation site and a small plastic tube(s) called a wound drain(s) will be inserted during the operation. This will allow unwanted substances to drain naturally and healing to take place. These are usually removed after 2 weeks but may need to remain in place for up to a month. Men should not need to stay in hospital during this time as a community nurse can visit them at home and check that they are recovering satisfactorily.
- ▶ It will take some time for the body to fully recover from this operation and men will need to take things easy for 4 - 6 weeks after surgery. Anti-embolism stockings (anti blood clot stockings) may be recommended to protect the circulation in the legs and may need to be worn for some time after the operation. A blood thinning drug will usually be prescribed.
- ▶ The operation site will have dissolvable stitches which will take 4 - 6 weeks to gradually dissolve.
- ▶ An appointment will usually be made a few weeks after the operation to ensure the site is healing. The results of the operation should also be available and any further treatment which may be needed will be discussed and planned at this time.

Tips for surgery

- ▶ Always ask the specialist exactly what the surgery will involve and what to expect after the operation.
- ▶ Plan ahead with regard to time off work and allowing for the healing process.
- ▶ Try and maximise health prior to the operation by taking steady exercise and eating healthily. It may also be a good idea to take a multivitamin tablet for a while before the operation and a short time after it.
- ▶ Try and get into the habit of moving the feet at rest and not crossing legs. This will help prevent possible blood clots forming in the legs as a result of reduced mobility immediately after the operation.

Cellulitis and wound infection

Cellulitis causes skin to suddenly become red, hot, swollen, painful or tender and is caused by infection in the deeper layers of the skin. It is usually treated with antibiotics.

Wound infection may have similar symptoms and will be treated in a similar manner as cellulitis. Both conditions may occur 7-10 days after surgery and it is important for men to discuss with their healthcare team how to recognise these conditions.

Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema occurs when lymph fluid (which flows around the body in one direction) accumulates in the groin area and prevents

adequate drainage to the lower extremities (usually the legs). This in turn can cause the leg(s) to swell. It can sometimes affect the penis and scrotum. Lymphoedema is treated by a specialist team of healthcare professionals who may perform gentle massage of the surrounding lymph nodes to help promote a normal flow of lymph fluid and may be used in conjunction with the application of special surgical support dressings. Treatment may take several months.

To help prevent possible lymphoedema following surgery or in the future it is extremely important to ensure meticulous skin hygiene.

- ▶ Try and avoid scratches or bites to the legs, for instance from insects (use insect repellent) or pets. For any scratch no matter how small, it is advisable to wash the area with soap and water and use an antiseptic cream such as Savlon to minimize infection. If the area becomes red, painful or swollen men will need to see their GP to rule out possible infection and may need to be prescribed antibiotics.
- ▶ Try and keep vulnerable areas covered if possible.
- ▶ Avoid sunburn to the area. Ensure a high factor sun block is always used if exposure to strong sunlight is expected.
- ▶ Use an electric razor to shave legs.
- ▶ Avoid inoculations and injections in the affected leg. This includes complementary treatments such as acupuncture.
- ▶ To maintain a healthy blood circulation which will help transport lymph fluid normally, avoid wearing tight garments such as socks or trousers that may restrict blood flow.
- ▶ Try and avoid becoming overweight and standing still for excessive periods of time.
- ▶ Try and remember not to cross legs which may compromise normal blood and lymph circulation.

Men should seek medical advice from their healthcare team if they experience:

- ▶ Persistent bleeding from the operation site.
- ▶ Uncontrolled pain.
- ▶ A high temperature and shaking or feeling as if a bad cold is present which could be a sign of infection.
- ▶ Swelling, redness or a foul smelling discharge at the operation site.

**PLEASE REFER TO ORCHID'S BOOKLET
PENILE CANCER; WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
FOR FURTHER ADVICE AND ADJUSTING TO LIFE AFTER SURGERY**

Important contact numbers

Specialist Nurse contact no.:

District Nurse contact no.:

Men always need to make sure that the contact details of the specialist team are at hand should they need to contact them prior to follow-up appointments.

Resources...

For further information and support on male cancer, please visit the Orchid website at www.orchid-cancer.org.uk

Orchid has produced a series of leaflets and factsheets on specific issues relating to male cancer which can be downloaded from the website.

Low-down, Orchid's newsletter, features the latest news and developments in male cancer including research, treatments, new services and events.

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Written and edited by:

Orchid Cancer Appeal and
Orchid Editorial Board

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References to sources of information used in this booklet are available from Orchid. If you would like to comment on the information included in the booklet or make suggestions about future editions Orchid would like to hear your feedback.

Orchid is the UK's leading charity dedicated to supporting men and their families who are affected by male-specific cancers: testicular, prostate and penile.

Established in 1996 by a young testicular cancer patient and the oncologist who saved his life, Orchid works to improve the lives of people affected by male cancers through a world class research programme, educational campaigns and raising awareness and an extensive support service.

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