

Your Sentinel Lymph Node Procedure explained (NSENT)

Please read this carefully as it contains information about preparing for the scan

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Aim of the patient information

This information is for patients having a Sentinel Lymph Node procedure. It aims to tell you what a Sentinel Lymph Node procedure is and to tell you what will happen.

General information

As the test involves small amounts of radiation, we ask that you are **not** accompanied by children under 18 or anyone who may be pregnant for the injection. You may bring one adult with you to the department.

The radioactive fluid given within the procedure is derived from human serum albumin. Please contact the nuclear medicine department if you have any queries about this.

What is the Sentinel Node (SLN)?

The sentinel lymph node (gland) is the first lymph node in your armpit to which breast cancer can spread.

What is Sentinel Node Biopsy (SNB)

By removing the sentinel lymph node, we can find out whether the breast cancer has or has not spread to the armpit nodes. This important information helps us to advise you about the stage of your cancer and the best type of breast cancer treatment for you.

Recent studies have shown that removal of the sentinel lymph node is just as safe and accurate as traditional armpit surgery which removes more nodes.

What does the procedure involve?

On the morning of your surgery, or the day before your surgery, you will attend Nuclear Medicine where a tiny amount of radioactive fluid is injected into the skin of your breast. The radioactivity used is less than required for a mammogram. Once the injection has been given you will return to the ward to prepare for surgery, or return home.

The radioactive fluid is carried along the lymph vessels to the sentinel lymph node. During your operation the surgeon will use a special probe to remove the radioactive node as this is the node most likely to be the SLN.

Benefit and risks of the procedure

Everyone receives some radiation every day from the radioactivity in the air, food we eat and even from space. The amount of radiation in this nuclear medicine procedure is similar to your natural exposure over a few days so the risks associated with it are low.

The main benefit of the procedure is making the correct diagnosis, so you can get the treatment that is right for you. This benefit is far greater than the small risk from radiation.

What are the other benefits of SNB?

- Less discomfort and quicker recovery of mobility in the shoulder/arm
- Less risk of lymphoedema
- No drains
- Shorter hospital stay and quicker overall recovery

What are the disadvantages of SNB?

- Injection of radioactivity into the breast may give slight discomfort
- If the pathologist finds the sentinel lymph node/nodes contain cancer, you will need more armpit treatment. This may require a second armpit operation.

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