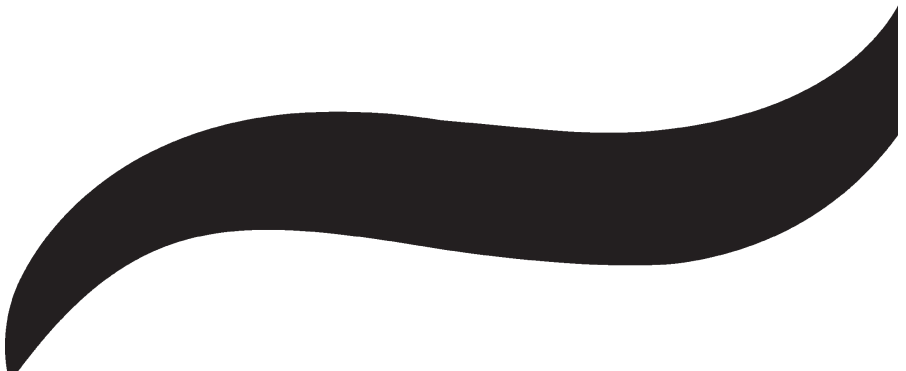




How to check your own Lymph Nodes

Information for patients
Dermatology Department



INTRODUCTION

Skin cancer can sometimes spread into the lymphatic system. At the clinic as part of your routine follow-up examination the doctor or nurse will usually examine your lymph nodes. The aim is to find out if there are any changes so that if you need investigations we can carry these out at an early stage. You may be asked to check your own lymph nodes between clinic appointments. The aim of this leaflet is to help you to learn how to carry out these checks. Not all lymph nodes will need to be checked regularly. It is usually the lymph nodes close to the area where the tumour was removed. Your doctor or nurse will show you how to do this and which lymph nodes you should check. The information is the same for both men and women and this leaflet will help to remind you what to do.

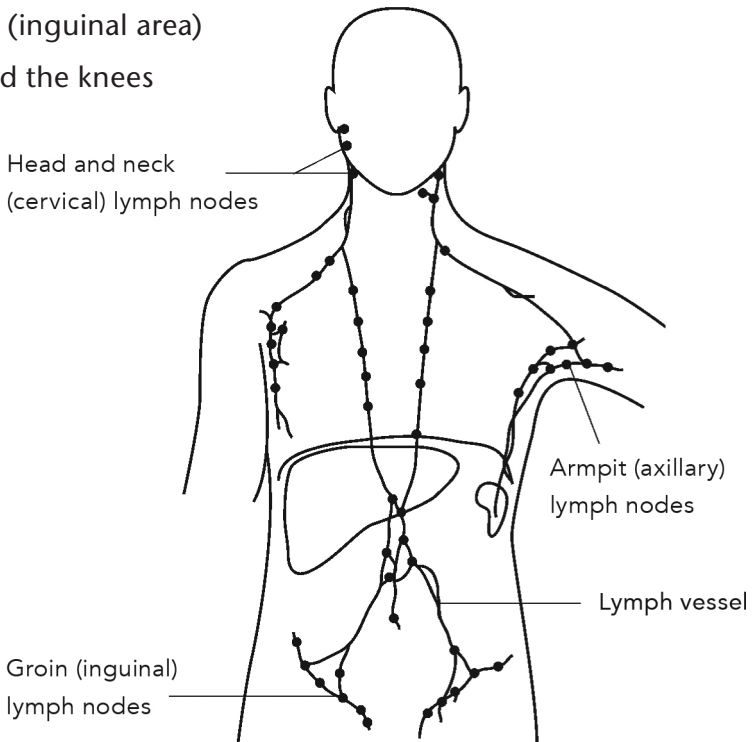
WHAT IS THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

The lymphatic system is made up of lymphatic vessels (something like blood vessels) and clumps of tissue called lymph nodes. The lymphatic vessels contain lymph (fluid) which is made up of proteins and waste material collected from all around the body. When the lymph fluid flows through the lymph nodes they filter out anything the body does not need. This can include bacteria, viruses and damaged cells such as cancer cells. This fluid eventually empties into the bloodstream.

WHERE YOU MIGHT FEEL ENLARGED LYMPH NODES?

You can feel changes in lymph nodes in the areas listed below:

- ❖ Head and neck
- ❖ Armpit (axilla)
- ❖ Groin (inguinal area)
- ❖ Behind the knees



Lymph nodes cannot usually be felt. Sometimes they can become enlarged and feel like a hard lump about the size of a pea (sometimes bigger). This can happen if someone has had an infection such as a sore throat. However, they can become enlarged if cancer cells have spread into them and that is why it is important to check your lymph nodes at regular intervals. You can ask your GP to check your lymph nodes if you are unsure.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU CHECK YOUR LYMPH NODES?

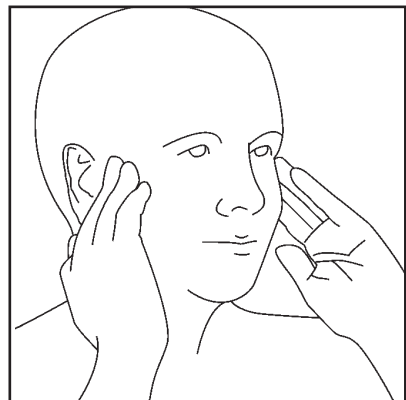
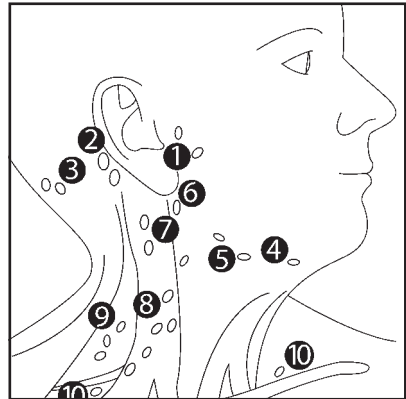
You should check your lymph nodes once a month. You can do this at the same time as you check your skin for any changes. The lymph nodes are the same on both sides of the body and you should check both sides.

POSITION OF LYMPH NODES IN THE HEAD AND NECK AREA

The head

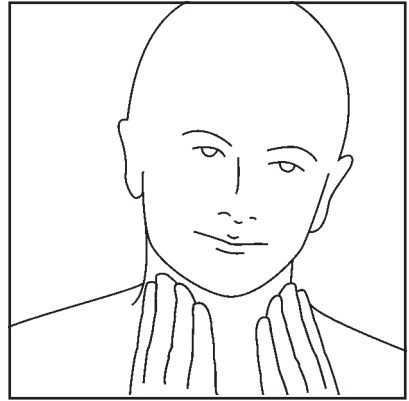
How to check for lymph nodes in the head and neck:

- ❖ Feel the lymph nodes with the fingertips using a circular motion.
- ❖ Start with the nodes in front of the ear (number 1) finishing at number 7.
- ❖ Compare both sides. If you have an enlarged node it may feel like a hard lump about the size of a pea. It can sometimes be larger than this.



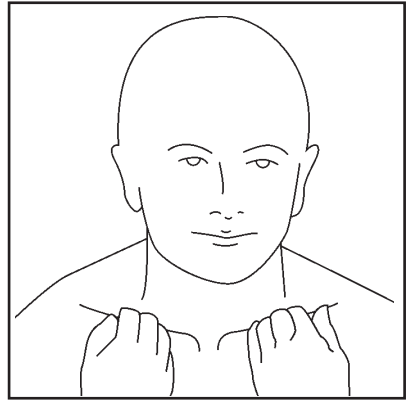
The neck

- ❖ Again use the fingertips to feel for any lymph nodes.
- ❖ Check for any lymph nodes in the area in the neck marked 8 and 9.
- ❖ To help relax the muscles tilt your head slightly towards the side you are going to check.
- ❖ Now press your fingers under the muscles.



Collar bone or clavicle

- ❖ To finish check for any lymph nodes in the area just above the collar bone, number 10.
- ❖ To help relax the skin, hunch your shoulders and bring your elbows forward.
- ❖ Again use the tips of your fingers to feel the area for any lumps.



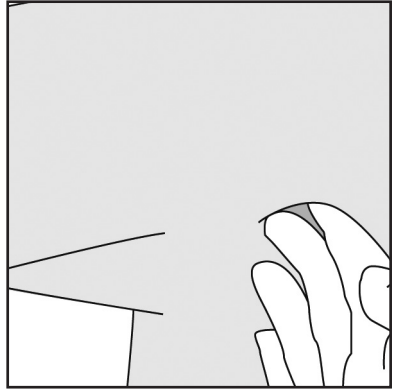
We advise you to check the nodes in the same order each time.

HOW TO CHECK FOR LYMPH NODES IN THE ARMPIT

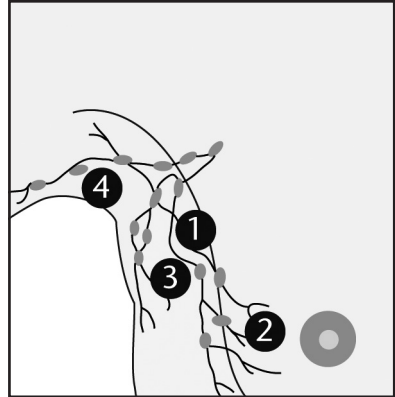
The armpit

Sit in a comfortable position and check each armpit in the same way.

- ❖ Lift your arm slightly, allow your shoulder to relax and place the fingers of the opposite hand into the hollow of the armpit.
- ❖ Feel the central area of the armpit. You will have to press quite firmly into the armpit (number 1).



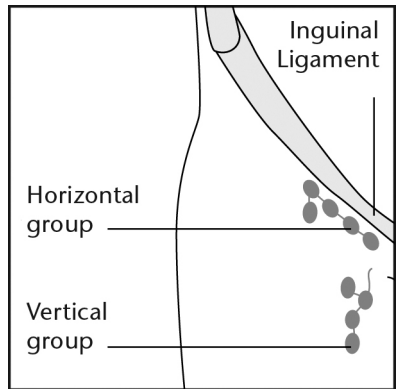
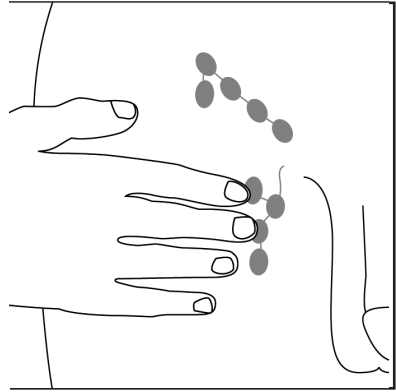
- ❖ Then check along the front border (number 2).
- ❖ Check the back border (number 3).
- ❖ And finally check along the inner border of the arm (number 4).



HOW TO CHECK FOR LYMPH NODES IN THE GROIN

There are two areas in each groin (inguinal) where you should check for lymph nodes. You will need to press quite firmly:

- ❖ Using the tips of the fingers you should feel for any lymph nodes in the groin.
- ❖ Then check for any nodes running your fingers down from the groin towards the knee for about 2-3 inches (5-8 millimetres).



HOW TO CHECK FOR LYMPH NODES BEHIND THE KNEE

- ❖ It is best to do this while lying down, not in a sitting position.
- ❖ Relax and bend the knee slightly.
- ❖ Using the fingertips feel in the crease behind the knee.
- ❖ Remember to check both sides.

It can take some time before you feel confident about doing this yourself. If you are unsure, please ask us to show you again.

Inguinal Ligament Horizontal group Vertical group

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, contact the Skin Cancer Nurse Specialist:
Telephone and voice mail 07789 303834.

Alternatively, contact your local Dermatology Clinic.

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