

(not dabbing) and it may settle. Contact a doctor or your surgical team or the skin oncology clinical nurse specialist for further advice.

### Fluid Collection (Seroma)

Occasionally fluid may collect under the scar line in the armpit or the groin if lymph nodes have been cleared (lymph node dissection) and more rarely after a sentinel lymph node biopsy. This collection of fluid can appear like a hard swelling. This is called a seroma and is a natural part of healing. This fluid that collects is usually reabsorbed by the body over time. However, if it causes discomfort or is persistent, you may need to have the fluid drained using a small needle and syringe in the outpatient's clinic. This is usually painless. In some cases the fluid may refill and you may need it drained a few times and more rarely it can be persistent.

### Swelling

This is a common symptom after surgery and can affect the area where the scar is located after a wide local excision or where lymph nodes have been removed. This is all part of the healing process and should settle 6-8 weeks following surgery.

Lymphoedema is a form of swelling that may happen after lymph nodes are removed in surgery (lymph node dissection). It is caused by a build up of lymph fluid in the tissues. Scar tissue formed after an operation may prevent good lymph drainage and it can lead to swelling. If this swelling persists after two months it may be an early sign of lymphoedema. Lymphoedema may present months, or even many years after surgery. Please contact your doctor or nurse for advice if you have any concerns as there are some treatments that may help.

### Other

If you have concerns or other symptoms after surgery for melanoma you can contact the skin oncology clinical nurse specialist for further advice. In an emergency please contact your doctor or attend the emergency department.

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### Further Information

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Patient Information  
on

# Recovery Following Melanoma Surgery

**This leaflet has been written as a guide for anyone recovering following wide local excision of a melanoma. You may have had a melanoma widely removed with or without a sentinel lymph node biopsy or further removal of lymph nodes. Most people will have an uneventful recovery but the following is a list of possible side-effects that may happen after surgery and what you can do. Please ask any member of the team looking after you if you have any questions or worries.**

### **Pain or Discomfort**

The degree of discomfort or soreness can vary on the type and extent of the surgery. You may experience it at the site of the scar, skin graft and/or donor site, or if you have had a sentinel lymph node biopsy or had lymph glands removed. Pain is more likely to persist for slightly longer if you have had lymph nodes removed (lymph node dissection) from your neck, armpit or groin.

It's important to take your painkillers as instructed to help prevent and relieve the pain for the first few days. The degree of pain or discomfort will settle and will have eased a lot by day three. **Do not take aspirin for pain relief unless prescribed by your doctor for another condition as this may encourage bleeding afterwards.**

Don't be afraid to follow your exercise program if this was advised. If you experience ongoing problems with managing pain please ask the doctor or nurse for further advice.

### **Oozing from the split donor skin graft site**

If you had a skin graft done then the donor split skin graft site may be more uncomfortable than the graft site itself. The donor site may feel painful and tight for the first few days after the surgery. This will gradually ease with time.

You may experience some ooze of fluid (maybe blood stained) through the dressing of the donor site if you had a skin graft done. Do not be alarmed as its quite normal. If it oozes or leaks through the outer dressing and bandage you can either add further padding to the outer dressing to re enforce or take off the outer padding and replace. The oozing should settle after a couple of days. **It is important not to touch the inner dressing that is in direct contact with the raw surface of the donor site itself – this should not be disturbed as it is normally removed in the plastic surgery clinic after 10-14 days.** If the dressing covering the donor site slips to expose the wound then you should seek help or advice from the hospital.

### **Scarring**

Your operation will leave a scar. If you have had a wide local excision which has been stitched closed it may have a tight feeling and look red but this will improve over the next few months. Once it is completely healed you can massage the area with a simple moisturising cream, as this helps it to soften and improves the sensation. Occasionally scars will stretch slightly over time.

### **Wound Infection**

Infection may develop immediately after surgery or at any time until the wound is healed. Wound healing usually takes 2-3 weeks. The following are symptoms which may indicate a wound infection:

- Increased pain in the wound
- Increased swelling in the wound
- Hot to touch
- Redness in the area
- A discharge or offensive smell from the wound

- Feeling generally unwell/Flu like symptoms
- Raised temperature

If you have a concern in relation to infection either to the wound, graft site or donor site please contact your doctor or the skin oncology clinical nurse specialist as you may need to have your wound reviewed.

### **Loss /altered sensation**

Sometimes when lymph glands are removed, you may experience a change or loss in sensation in the skin near the site of surgery with a variety of symptoms such as:

- Loss or reduced sensation
- Numbness
- Coldness
- Sensitivity to touch or pressure
- Burning or tingling sensation
- Pins and needles

You may experience similar symptoms in or around your surgical scar or graft site. These symptoms should improve with time but occasionally they might be slow to settle and may need some therapy input. Sometimes feelings of numbness and reduced sensation may be more permanent.

### **Bleeding**

Although measures are taken during surgery to prevent bleeding, occasionally it can occur when you have left the operating theatre or even when you have gone home. It is normal to see some blood on the wound dressing but if you notice excessive blood on the dressing or blood leaking out from the dressing. Then apply constant pressure for 20 minutes with a cloth