

# HOW TO CHECK YOUR LYMPH NODES BEFORE YOUR CLINIC APPOINTMENT

## What are the aims of this leaflet?

As part of your routine follow-up it is usual for your doctor to examine the main lymph gland regions in your neck, underarms and groin, as well as checking for enlargement of your liver or spleen. At this time, when many consultations take place over the telephone or video-link, it is important that you are able to check your lymph glands yourself to be able to help your doctor know if there may be a problem. This is a brief guide to help you confidently examine yourself in advance of your clinic review.

## How often should I check my lymph nodes?

In general, we recommend performing a full check of your main lymph gland areas around once per month, and within a week or so of your haematology appointment.

## Should I be able to feel normal lymph nodes?

Lymph nodes (also referred to as lymph glands) form part of the lymphatic system and are positioned throughout the body from the head and neck to the groin. A network of fine tubes that carry lymph fluid, which contains immune cells, connects the lymph nodes throughout your body. In health, lymph nodes are usually too small to feel, but may be felt as small pea-like lumps in very slim individuals.

As lymph nodes are the site that normal lymphocytes migrate to in order to mount an immune response, lymph nodes may get bigger in response to infections, for example an enlarged neck node at the time of a sore throat or dental abscess. This is a normal reaction to fight infection and these lymph glands are usually tender and disappear once the infection settles.

## How do I spot an abnormal lymph node?

Lymph nodes that contain leukaemia or lymphoma cells are generally painless, at least until they reach the size of several centimetres across. You should however still let your doctor know of any tender lymph nodes that persist for more than a week or two, particularly if you have not had an infection.

When lymph nodes enlarge due to an accumulation of abnormal lymphocytes, they feel like oval jelly or kidney beans that are moderately firm and smooth. As you examine yourself the lymph node may catch under your fingers or seem to move slightly.



## Where should I check?

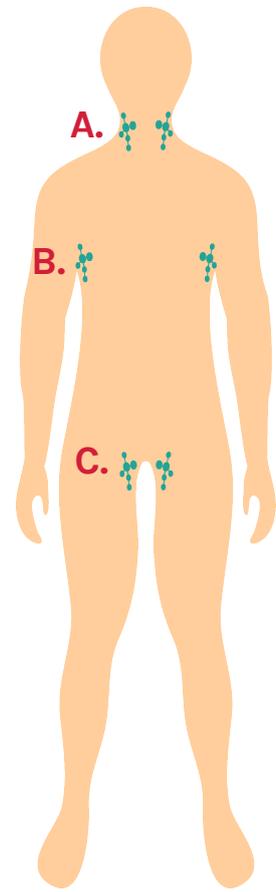
This leaflet will run over how to check for lymph nodes in the following areas:

- A.** Head and neck
- B.** Axillae (under arms)
- C.** Groins

## General points on how to feel for lymph nodes

To examine your lymph nodes in any area, we recommend bringing your fingers together and keeping your fingers together and straight, using your fingertips to feel for any nodes.

You may check the lymph node areas in any order, but it is best to check one side of each area at a time. If you do feel a lymph node in any area, consider how large it feels, for example in relation to a pea, or bean. You will find it handy to have a pen and paper to make a note of anything you find as you go along.



### A. How to examine lymph nodes in the neck

- Start with your head positioned so that you are looking at something directly in front of you. With the fingers of your left hand together and straight, feel under your chin using small circular movements.
- Next, continue to move your fingers in circular movements and move your fingers progressively along the underside of your jaw towards your left ear, feeling for any lumps. Feel just in front of and behind your ear. From here, move your fingers round to the back of your neck.
- Still using the same circular movement, feel down the front and side of your neck toward the collarbone. You will be feeling around the main muscles that move your neck from side to side at this stage.
- Finally, tilt your head forward slightly and feel along the soft area above your collarbone, starting from the middle and working out toward your shoulder.
- Repeat the above steps using your right hand to examine the right side of your neck.

### B. How to examine the lymph nodes in the armpit

- Sit in a comfortable position and remove clothing to vest or underwear to ensure you can easily reach all areas to be examined.
- First, examine your right armpit with your left hand. Raise your right arm slightly and keeping your fingers together and straight, place your fingers high up into the top of your armpit.
- Using similar circular movements as you used to examine your neck, feel gently for any rounded lumps in this area.



- Next, keeping your fingers together, pull your fingers downward from the armpit against your chest wall, feeling to check whether any lumps catch under your fingers. Repeat this motion at the front and back of your armpit.
- Finally, feel along the upper part of your inner arm in a similar way, again feeling for any lumps that catch under your fingers.
- Repeat the same steps above to examine your left armpit with your right hand.

## C. How to examine the lymph nodes in your groin

- The lymph nodes at the groin are located along the crease where your upper leg joins your abdomen. There are also a few lymph nodes in the upper inner thigh that drain lymph fluid from your legs. It is important to check both areas in turn.
- You should either stand or lie flat to examine the lymph nodes in your groin.
- First, use your left hand to examine the left side. Keeping your fingers together and flat as before, feel along the crease at your groin from one end to the other, making small circular movements.
- Next, starting from the inner end of your groin crease, make small circular movements downwards to your upper thigh.
- Repeat the steps above, using your right hand to examine the glands in the right-hand side of your groin.

## Should I also check my spleen?

It is more difficult to examine your own spleen, unless it is quite a bit larger than normal. There are however a number of symptoms to look out for that can indicate your spleen is enlarging.

These include:

- Pain or fullness in the upper left side of your abdomen, which may get worse with bending over and may also cause pain to be felt in your left shoulder-tip.
- Feeling full after eating only small meals due to your spleen compressing the stomach.

You will likely be asked about these symptoms and also whether you have any symptoms termed 'B' symptoms that can indicate active lymphoma or leukaemia.

These include:

- Unexplained fevers
- Drenching night sweats
- Weight loss

