

Diagnosing Non Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL)

A Quick Guide

Contents

This is a brief summary of 'Diagnosing non Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL)' from our website. You will find more detailed information on there. In this information there are sections on

- Tests for non Hodgkin lymphoma
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- After the tests
- Questions for your doctor

You can view this information in a larger print on our website.

Tests for non Hodgkin lymphoma

Most people begin by going to see their GP. Your doctor will ask you about your general health and examine you. They may take a blood test to check your general health. As most causes of enlarged lymph glands are not serious, your doctor may suggest examining you again in a couple of weeks. If the glands stay enlarged your GP may want to refer you to the hospital for tests.

If you are referred to hospital

At the hospital the doctor will examine you again. They will ask you about any other illnesses you have had. You will probably have a chest X-ray and blood tests to check your general health.

Lymph node biopsy

The only way to get a definite diagnosis of the cause of a swollen lymph node is to remove part or all of it and look at it under a microscope. If the lymph node is near the surface of your skin, the doctor is likely to remove the whole node. This is called an excision biopsy. It is a small operation, done under local anaesthetic or general anaesthetic.

If the swollen lymph node is deeper into your body, the doctor may take a sample of tissue from the node using a needle. They may use an ultrasound scan or CT scan to help guide the needle. This is called an ultrasound or CT guided core biopsy. You usually have this under local anaesthetic in the radiology department.

For most people, waiting for the biopsy result is a very anxious time. It may take about a week for the results to come through. You can talk to your GP in the meantime if you are worried. Your result may be sent to your GP or you may be asked to go back to the hospital to an outpatient clinic.

Further tests for non Hodgkin lymphoma

If you had a swollen lymph node biopsied and lymphoma cells were found, you will need to have more tests. These tests are to find the type of lymphoma and whether it has spread. The doctors will need to know which parts of your body are affected.

You are most likely to have blood tests and a CT scan. You may also need a PET scan, a bone marrow test or an ultrasound scan.

Tests occasionally used in lymphoma

Some people have one or two other tests, as well as the ones above. You may have

- Lumbar puncture
- Endoscopy
- MRI scan or bone scan

After the tests

Waiting for results is a very anxious time for most people. While you are waiting it may help to talk to your clinical nurse specialist or a close friend or relative about how you feel. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through similar experiences.

What to ask your doctor about non Hodgkin lymphoma tests

Some questions you may want to ask your doctor

- What tests will I have?
- Why do I need to have these tests?
- What will the tests show?
- Are any of the tests painful?
- Are there any risks with any of these tests?
- Is there anything I need to do to prepare for the tests?
- Do any of the tests have after effects and if so, what?
- Do I have to stay in hospital for any of the tests?
- Can I bring someone with me when I have the tests?
- How long will it take to get the results of the tests?
- Who will give me the test results?
- When will you be able to tell me more about the type of NHL I have and the likely treatment?
- Is there a clinical nurse specialist who I can talk to?

For more information, visit our website <http://www.cruk.org/cancerhelp>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. Our information is based on the best current scientific evidence and reviewed regularly by leading clinicians and experts in health and social care.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on 0808 800 4040 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday.

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