



Disclaimer: This leaflet provides general information and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. It is essential to consult with a qualified healthcare professional for any health concerns or before making any decisions related to your health or treatment.

Overview

A neck lump is any swelling, bump, or lump in the neck. Neck lumps are common, and most are not serious. However, a neck lump can sometimes be a sign of a more serious condition, so it's important to have any new lump checked by a doctor, especially if it persists for more than a few weeks.

Symptoms and Causes

Neck lumps can vary greatly in size, shape, and texture. They can be hard or soft, movable or fixed, painful or painless. The location of the lump can also provide clues about its cause. The most common causes of neck lumps include:



- **Swollen Lymph Nodes:** These small, bean-shaped glands are part of the body's immune system. They can swell in response to infections, such as a cold, sore throat, or ear infection. Swollen lymph nodes are usually tender to the touch.
- **Infections:** Bacterial or viral infections can cause abscesses (collections of pus) or inflamed glands in the neck.
- **Cysts:** These fluid-filled sacs can develop under the skin and are usually harmless unless they become infected.
- **Lipomas:** These are slow-growing, fatty lumps that are usually soft and movable. They are generally harmless.
- **Thyroid Problems:** The thyroid gland, located in the lower front of the neck, can develop nodules (lumps) or become enlarged (goitre).
- **Other Causes:** Less common causes of neck lumps can include congenital abnormalities, salivary gland problems, and, in rare cases, cancer.

Diagnosis and Investigations

Diagnosing the cause of a neck lump usually begins with a thorough medical history and physical examination. Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms, including how long the lump has been present, whether it's painful, and if you have any other symptoms, such as fever, weight loss, or difficulty swallowing.

During the physical exam, your doctor will carefully examine the lump, noting its size, shape, texture, and location. They may also examine other areas of your body, including your ears, nose, and throat.

Depending on the findings of the history and physical exam, your doctor may recommend further investigations, such as:

- **Blood tests:** These can help identify signs of infection or other underlying medical conditions.

- **Ultrasound scan:** This uses sound waves to create images of the neck and can help determine the nature of the lump.
- **Fine-needle aspiration biopsy:** A thin needle is inserted into the lump to collect a sample of cells for examination under a microscope. This can help diagnose cancer or other conditions.
- **Other imaging tests:** In some cases, a CT scan or MRI scan may be needed to provide more detailed images of the neck and surrounding structures.

Management and Treatment

The treatment for a neck lump depends on the underlying cause.

- **Swollen lymph nodes due to a viral infection:** These often resolve on their own without treatment.
- **Bacterial infections:** Antibiotics may be prescribed to treat the infection.
- **Cysts:** Small, uncomplicated cysts may not require treatment. Larger or infected cysts may need to be drained or surgically removed.
- **Lipomas:** These can usually be left alone, but they can be surgically removed if they are causing cosmetic concerns or discomfort.
- **Thyroid problems:** Treatment depends on the specific condition and may include medication, radioactive iodine therapy, or surgery.
- **Cancer:** Treatment for neck lumps caused by cancer may involve surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or a combination of these treatments.

Prevention

Many neck lumps cannot be prevented. However, practicing good hygiene, such as frequent handwashing, can help reduce the risk of infections that can cause swollen lymph nodes. Avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can also help reduce the risk of certain types of neck lumps, including those caused by cancer.

Outlook / Prognosis

The outlook for most neck lumps is very good. Many lumps are benign and resolve on their own or with simple treatment. Even cancerous neck lumps can often be successfully treated, especially if they are diagnosed and treated early. It's essential to seek medical advice for any new neck lump, especially if it persists for more than a few weeks, to ensure prompt diagnosis and appropriate treatment.