



Birmingham Breast Care
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Will I Require Chemotherapy?

You've now had surgery. Assessment of the lymph nodes and removal of the cancer have been completed. This surgical procedure has dealt with the local treatment of your cancer and has allowed us to stage its process.

It is very important to realize that cancer is a disease, which can affect the entire body. Cells can spread from the primary cancer site to the lungs, liver, and elsewhere. Chemotherapy, however, treats the entire body. It destroys cancer cells that may have migrated elsewhere.

Most patients will require either chemotherapy or hormonal therapy. The size of the tumor and the status of the axillary nodes are the major factors, which are considered in making the decision regarding chemotherapy. When your tumor was removed, it underwent a number of tests to determine how fast it grows, and how aggressive it is. Even if the tumor is small and the lymph nodes are negative, you may still need chemotherapy if the tumor is very aggressive.

A medical oncologist (a medical doctor specializing in the treatment of cancer) can tell you the benefit that might be expected with chemotherapy. As your surgeon, I encourage you to follow through with complete treatment of your cancer. It's best for you and your family to know that you have done everything possible to treat your cancer.

You may require a special IV for chemotherapy infusions. This is called a port. (The Lifeport is a port connected to tubing placed below the skin in a large vein, using x-ray guidance.) This is a minor procedure done under sedation in the operating room. The port allows the chemotherapy nurses to easily infuse the chemotherapy agents through the port into a large vein, and avoids using an arm vein for IV fusions. This is a great improvement in comfort to patients over years past when most chemotherapy was infused into arm veins.

Susan B. Winchester, MD
General Surgeon

"Caring for patients' body, mind and spirit."

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