



## **DR IAN HAY LTD** **CONSULTING PAEDIATRICIANS**

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### **PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET: LYMPHADENOPATHY (Swelling of glands)**

The term Lymphadenopathy means pathology (something wrong or altered) in the lymph glands, but in the vast majority of cases it is benign (entirely normal reaction) and is of no concern.

Lymph glands are found all over the body, but are easily felt in the neck, armpit (axilla) and groin, especially in otherwise healthy children. You can even see them if you look into the throat, as tonsils are just visible lymph nodes!

Lymph glands can be thought of as filters within the lymphatic system of the body. The lymphatic system is a series of thin-walled tubes which drain the tissues. If there is an infection within the drainage area of the glands, e.g. an infected throat or a skin infection on a foot or hand, the glands in the neck or in the groin or armpit respectively, will become swollen and may be tender. This allows the immune system to attack the infection without it spreading throughout the body. The glands then usually revert to their original size, but in some cases the body *overreacts* and the glands become hard and don't shrink. They can remain enlarged for a long time and sometimes forever.

Subsequent infections may cause an increase in the size of these glands, but these will then resolve back to their pre-infection size when the infection has resolved.

In rare situations in childhood, especially in the absence of an obvious infection, gland enlargement does need further investigation e.g. relentless increase in size, matting together of the glands or attachment of the glands to the skin or deeper tissues. Tests need to be done to ensure there is no underlying problem that needs treatment.

In summary, typical benign or *reactive* glands are firm, mobile and not obviously attached to the skin or deeper tissues. As they are responding or reacting normally to an infection they are often referred to as Reactive Lymph Node and are a sign of a healthy functioning normal immune system. They increase in size during an infection, usually viral, and then decrease in size and can safely be ignored once assessed by a doctor.

**Dr Raymond Brown**