**Diagnostic testing**

**Diagnostic testing may include:**

* blood tests to check for infection and underlying conditions
* imaging tests, such as X-ray, CT scan, MRI, or ultrasound to get a better look at the lymph nodes

**Biopsy**

The only way to know for certain if your lymph nodes are benign versus malignant is to perform a lymph node biopsy. Your doctor may recommend this if:

* Physical examination and diagnostic testing can’t determine the cause.
* You’ve recently been treated for cancer or you’re currently in treatment.

A biopsy involves getting a sample of tissue from the lymph nodes. This can be done with a needle, or the lymph nodes can be removed during surgery. The tissue samples will go to a laboratory where a pathologist will use a microscope to look for cancer cells.

A biopsy often follows a cancer diagnosis, even if the lymph nodes appear normal.