

Biopsy

Information for patients

What is a biopsy?

A biopsy is a procedure where a small piece of tissue is removed from an area so that it can be looked at closely under a microscope. The biopsy may aim to remove an area completely (an excision biopsy). This is usually only appropriate for small lumps or swellings. Occasionally, only a small piece of an abnormal area is removed to confirm a diagnosis (an incisional biopsy).

How is it done?

In most cases biopsies are carried out under local anaesthesia (an injection into the area to numb it). The injection takes a couple of minutes to work and means that the biopsy should be painless for you. The biopsy usually leaves a small hole that often requires stitching. In most cases the stitches used are dissolvable and take around two weeks to disappear.

Is there much soreness or swelling afterwards?

When the local anaesthetic wears off after a few hours, you should have relatively little pain or swelling. You might need to take simple painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, but please discuss this with your GP or pharmacist if you are taking any other medication. Usually any discomfort only lasts a few days.

Will there be much bleeding?

Although there may be a little bleeding at the time of biopsy, this usually stops very quickly and is unlikely to be a problem if the area is stitched. If the biopsy site bleeds again when you get home, this can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for at least 10 minutes with a rolled up handkerchief or gauze swab. If the bleeding does not stop, please contact the department on the telephone number at the top of this leaflet.

When can I return to work?

This largely depends on your job and how you feel after the procedure. Most people are able to return to work later the same day.

Are there any things I should do when I get home?

Be careful not to bite the numb areas of your mouth. On the day of surgery you should avoid rinsing your mouth out vigorously as this may cause bleeding. You should clean your teeth normally, including those teeth next to the site of the biopsy. If you find that food catches around the stitches, the area can be gently rinsed with a mouthwash or warm salt water (dissolve a teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) starting on the day **after** surgery.

Will I need another appointment?

As the stitches are dissolvable, a review appointment is not always necessary but we will tell you if a follow-up appointment is needed.

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