

Breast Services

Having a biopsy of the breast (core and vacuum-assisted)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to give you information about having a biopsy of the breast. We hope that it will answer some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have at this time. This leaflet is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your medical team but aims to help you understand more about the procedure.

What is a biopsy and why do I need one?

If a lump or other abnormality can be seen on your mammogram or ultrasound, we need to be sure what it is. Most lumps are benign (non-cancerous) but we cannot always tell from the examination and scans alone. You will then need a biopsy. This requires a small cut to be made into your breast (under local anaesthetic) and a tissue sample to be taken; there will be very little scarring. The sample will be sent to a laboratory and examined under a microscope.

Consent

Before the procedure, a member of the team will explain what it involves and answer any questions you may have. You will then be asked for your consent. If you do not understand what you are being told, let the team member know so they can explain again. The biopsy will not happen without your consent.

How is a biopsy of the breast performed?

The biopsy takes place in the outpatient department and is normally done by a radiologist. You can eat and drink as normal before and after the biopsy.

Either X-rays or ultrasound guidance will be used to assist with the biopsy.

You will be asked to undress from the waist upwards and to either lie on the couch or sit.

If ultrasound is used, you will be lying down and have some cool jelly put on your breast. A probe will then be used on the skin of your breast; this will not hurt or feel uncomfortable, just possibly a little cold. If X-rays are used, you may be asked to sit or lie down. Your breast will be positioned in the machine and held firmly; this will feel just like the mammogram you will have had before.

Depending on what is seen on your scans, you will either have a core biopsy or a vacuum assisted biopsy. Before the biopsy your skin on your breast will be cleaned with some antiseptic

liquid and then a small amount of local anaesthetic will be injected into the breast to numb the area; this can sometimes sting a little.

Whether you are having a core or vacuum assisted biopsy, a tiny cut is then made in the skin to allow for the needle to be inserted and the biopsy tissue to be taken. This will not hurt as the local anaesthetic will have numbed the area.

Core biopsy

If you have a core biopsy, the needle may need to be put in several times to get enough tissue to analyse. Each time a sample is taken you will hear a clicking sound; this is nothing to be alarmed about and is completely normal.

After the biopsy a dressing will be put on the area. You should leave this in place for 48 hours and then you can remove it.

Vacuum-assisted core biopsy

If you have a vacuum-assisted core biopsy, a needle is inserted, and then gentle suction is used to obtain the samples. You may hear a sucking sound. Pressure will then be applied to the area for at least 10 minutes; this will stop any bleeding and reduce bruising afterwards.

You will have a pressure dressing put on the wound once it has stopped bleeding. This should stay in place for 48 hours, after which you can remove it.

You will be asked to wait in the department for at least another 20 minutes to be sure there is no more bleeding.

Sometimes a tiny metal clip is inserted and left in your breast where the biopsy is taken from; this allows the same area to be easily identified again if needed. This clip is designed to remain permanently in your breast and does no harm; if you go on to have surgery the clip will be removed. If the clip is not removed and you require an MRI scan in the future, you should notify the person performing the scan.

Are there any risks associated with having a biopsy of the breast?

There are some risks, the main ones associated with having a biopsy of the breast are bruising, bleeding and occasionally, infection. These will all be discussed with you before your procedure.

Will it hurt?

You may feel some stinging while the local anaesthetic is being injected into the breast, and some discomfort and pressure during the procedure.

How long will the biopsy itself take?

This will depend on which type of biopsy you have. A core biopsy takes about 10 minutes; a vacuum-assisted core biopsy takes about 20 minutes. It is likely that you will be ready to go home about 60-90 minutes after your appointment start time.

Will I be able to resume my normal activities right away?

Most people feel fine after their biopsy and can return to their normal routine straightaway, such as driving or going to work. However, we recommend that you avoid lifting or strenuous exercise for at least 48 hours.

What instructions should I follow after the biopsy?

You will receive a separate leaflet at your appointment containing instructions for aftercare.

When can I expect the results of my biopsy?

After your biopsy and before you go home, you will be given an appointment to receive your results. Your results can take up to seven days. This is because the tissue sample requires careful preparation before it can be examined under a microscope and the results discussed at the weekly breast multi-disciplinary team meeting.

Who do I contact for more help or information?

It is important that you have all the information you need before your biopsy, and we are happy to answer any questions that you may have when you have your appointment. If you have any concerns before the appointment, then please contact the breast services reception team on 0203 311 5373.

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777**. You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net** The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:
Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net** Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK_FREE or WiFiSPARK_PREMIUM

