

Breast services

Your visit to the breast clinic

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to give you information about your appointment at the breast clinic. We hope 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 what will happen on your visit. If you have any questions please speak to your medical team.

What will happen during the appointment?

When you arrive at the breast clinic you should register with the reception team. You will then be seen by a doctor or nurse who is a specialist in breast diseases. You will be asked about your symptoms, examined and may be recommended for some tests. As we aim to do these tests on the same day as your appointment, we cannot tell you beforehand exactly how long your appointment will take.

The tests are usually done within an hour, but as the clinic can be very busy, **we recommend that you allow three hours for your appointment. If you cannot stay in the department for this period of time, you may need to rebook.**

Your visit will usually consist of three parts:

1. Meeting your doctor or nurse and having a physical examination.
2. Imaging of the breast – for women over 35 this is usually done with a mammogram (an x-ray of the breast) but we may also do an ultrasound scan. For women under 35 we normally only do an ultrasound scan as it is more effective in seeing abnormalities in younger breasts.
3. Needle biopsy – this may be done depending on the results from your physical examination and imaging.

During your appointment you will be asked to undress from the waist upwards and so we recommend that you wear separates, i.e. a top and a skirt or trousers. Deodorant and talcum powder may affect the quality of a mammogram, so please do not use them on the day of your appointment if you are over 35. Alternatively, you can wash them off if you need a mammogram.

Mammogram

This is an x-ray of the breast performed by a specially trained female radiographer called a mammographer. Two images of each breast are taken using an x-ray machine. This may be uncomfortable but should not be painful. There is a separate leaflet on *Having a mammogram* - please ask staff for a copy if you would like one.

Ultrasound scan

Depending on the symptoms you have, the result of the mammogram (if you have one), and your age, you may have an ultrasound scan. This is performed by a specialist radiologist (a type of doctor) using a small hand-held 'probe' and some cool jelly which is rubbed onto your skin. Slight pressure is applied but you should not find it uncomfortable. The scan takes place in a darkened room to enable the images to be seen clearly.

Needle biopsy

If a lump can be seen on the mammogram or ultrasound scan, we need to be completely certain about its nature. Most lumps are benign (non-cancerous), but we cannot always be sure from the examination and scans alone. If this is the case you will need to have a needle biopsy. This requires a small sample to be taken and then examined under a microscope.

There are two types of needle biopsy (explained below), both of which are usually performed by a radiologist using an ultrasound scan to guide the procedure. This ensures that we take the sample from the right area.

If you are on any medication that might make bleeding worse, such as aspirin or anticoagulants, please tell the doctor before the procedure.

Core biopsy

This is the most common type of biopsy. A small amount of local anaesthetic is injected into the breast to numb the area. We then make a tiny cut in the skin, insert a hollow needle and take a sample when the tip of the needle is in the right place. This makes a clicking sound. The radiologist will let you hear this sound before doing the biopsy so that you do not get alarmed during the biopsy itself. We usually take more than one sample to be sure that we have enough tissue to give an accurate diagnosis. There is often some bruising and slight discomfort once the anaesthetic wears off. During your appointment we will give you a leaflet containing simple aftercare advice.

Fine needle aspiration

Sometimes we decide to take a few cells rather than a piece of tissue. This is done by the doctor using a small, hollow needle which sucks the cells into a syringe. We do not usually inject a local anaesthetic as this causes greater discomfort than the biopsy itself.

When will I get my results?

The results of the imaging (mammogram and/or ultrasound scan) are usually available while you are in the clinic. Most people who come to our clinics have nothing seriously wrong with them and will be reassured that this is the case before going home. If you have a needle biopsy, you will get your results in 10 to 12 days.

You are welcome to bring someone with you when you attend your clinic appointments.

Medical students

Our hospitals are teaching hospitals which means that our doctors teach medical students during some of their clinics. If you would prefer not to have medical students present during your consultation, please tell a member of the team. This will not affect the quality of care you receive in any way.

Research

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust is committed to excellence in care and clinical research. Clinical research studies aim to find out if a new treatment or procedure is safe and works better than the treatment currently used.

If you have a needle biopsy, you may be asked by your radiologist if some of the tissue sample can be used to help our understanding of diseases of the breast. If you agree, you will be asked to give your written consent. Please note that your decision will not affect your care in any way or impact on the assessment of your condition. If you have questions about our research, please speak to your radiologist.

Who should I contact for more help or information?

It is important that you have all the information you need before the appointment. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have when you attend for your appointment. However, if you have any questions before please contact the breast services outpatient reception on 020 3311 5373.

When you are in the clinic, please do not hesitate to tell the reception team if you think you have been forgotten or you have waited a long time to be seen.

We have both male and female healthcare professionals in the breast unit. Should you wish to see only female healthcare professionals we can usually arrange this but we may need to rebook your appointment. If at all possible, please contact the booking office before your appointment if this is the case. The radiographers who perform the mammograms are all female.

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 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). 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

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk