

Breast Biopsy

Patient Information

Breast Care Nurses

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What is a breast biopsy?

This is an operation to remove a piece of breast tissue so that it can be examined under a microscope. This may be done because earlier tests have not been able to give a conclusive 'All clear' or because you have expressed a continuing worry over a lump even though tests have been favourable.

What does the operation consist of?

A cut is made over the lump or area of concern. An area of tissue underneath the cut is then removed which will include the "lump" for testing. The skin is then closed and dressing is put on.

How much tissue will be removed?

The aim of the operation is to remove enough tissue to give an accurate and reliable result from the tests, but not so much that the shape of the breast is likely to be changed when everything has settled after the operation. Whenever possible the cut is placed to give the best chance of a pleasing result.

How do you know which bit to remove?

Most patients have a lump which can be felt easily and which may be marked before the operation with a skin-marking pen. Some patients will have abnormalities that show on x-ray but which cannot be felt. Special techniques are used before the operation to find these abnormalities. You will have been told about this in the Breast Screening Unit or Surgical Out Patient Clinic if this is necessary.

Will I feel anything during the operation?

Most breast biopsies are done with the patient asleep under a full general anaesthetic. You will not be aware of anything until you wake up in the recovery ward.

Sometimes biopsies are done under local anaesthetic, giving an injection to make the area of the operation numb so that you will not feel pain when the cut is made. You may feel dull sensations of pressure and pulling. The decision to use a local anaesthetic is usually made in the Outpatients clinic when the decision is made to operate, so you should be aware if this is likely.

If you have a local anaesthetic you will be fully awake during and after the procedure. This can be an advantage but if you find the process distressing you may be given a sedative injection which will have a calming effect and which may mean that you remember nothing about the procedure.

How will I feel afterwards?

When you first wake up your breast will feel sore. You will be given whatever painkillers are necessary. You may have a large padded dressing pressing firmly onto the breast. This is to reduce the risk of bleeding after the operation. At this stage you should normally

not have a great deal of pain, but you may need to take painkilling tablets for the first few days. Wearing a bra will help too.

There may be a lump under the scar. This is normal and will settle over the first 2 to 3 months.

Excessive pain, obvious swelling of the breast and excessive bruising in the first few days may indicate a significant collection of blood underneath the wound. If you or the District Nurse are worried about this, please contact your Breast Care Nurse.

When can I go home?

This operation is done as a day case so you will be allowed home the same day.

What about my stitches?

Dissolvable stitches are usually used and will be covered with a dressing. This dressing can be removed 5 days after your operation, further dressings will not be required if the wound is dry.

When will I get the results?

An appointment will be made for you to come back to the Outpatients Clinic about 2 weeks later. You will be checked and given the result. It takes several days for the lump to be processed and examined.

What if it is bad news?

Most women are worried about breast cancer. We hope you will be given the 'all clear', but if not then you will be given information you need about further treatments and the necessary arrangements will be made. Of course, most patients find the diagnosis of breast cancer very distressing, and trained breast care nurses are available to talk to you about your fears and to give you more information about treatment. The clinic nurse will make an appointment.

Contact information

The Breast Care Nurses can be contacted at:

Suite 5
Thomas Linacre Centre
Parsons Walk
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Telephone 01942 774720

Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

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Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use and store the information we hold about you, please take a look at our “how we use your information” leaflet which can be found on the Trust website: https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient_information/leaflets/

This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in the department/ward.

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