

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET - BIOPSY

What is a biopsy?

A biopsy is a simple operation where a small piece of tissue is removed from an area. This can be looked at closely under a microscope.

There are two types of biopsy:

An **excisional biopsy** removes the whole area. This is usually carried out for small lumps or swellings. Further treatment may not be necessary.

An **incisional biopsy** involves removing a small piece of the abnormal area. This is carried out to confirm what something is. Then we can decide on the best treatment.

How is it done?

Most biopsies are carried out with local anaesthetic (a numbing injection into the area). The injection takes a couple of minutes to work. The biopsy should be painless. The biopsy usually leaves a small hole that often requires stitching. Usually, the stitches used are dissolvable. They take around two weeks to disappear.

The whole process usually takes around 15 minutes from start to finish.

Another type of biopsy is a **needle biopsy**. A small sample from the centre of a lesion is collected by inserting a small needle through the skin. The wound usually heals on its own. A stitch is not needed.

Is there much soreness or swelling afterwards?

The numbness wears off after a few hours. There is usually not much pain or swelling. However, occasionally you may need to take simple painkillers (e.g. Paracetamol or Ibuprofen). Any discomfort should only last a few days. Tongue biopsies are usually more painful than biopsies of other areas of the mouth.

Will there be much bleeding?

There may be a little bleeding at the time of the biopsy. However, this usually stops very quickly. It is unlikely to be a problem once the wound is stitched. Should the biopsy site bleed again when you get home this can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for at least 20 minutes. It is best to use a damp, rolled up, linen handkerchief or swab. If the bleeding does not stop quickly you should contact the clinic or hospital where you had the treatment.

When can I return to work?

This depends on your job and how you feel after the operation. A biopsy is a minor procedure and for most people there is only minimal discomfort afterwards. Most people feel 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 area that has been numbed. On the day of surgery you should avoid rinsing your mouth out vigorously as this may cause bleeding. You should clean your teeth as normal. Include those teeth next to the site of the biopsy. If you find that food catches around the stitches then the area can be gently rinsed with a mouthwash or warm salt water. Dissolve a teaspoon of table salt in a cup of warm water. Start the mouthwashes on the day after surgery.

Will I need another appointment?

Since the stitches that are used are usually dissolvable an appointment is not always necessary to remove them. One can be arranged if you are having any problems post operatively or the

stitches are bothering you. However, you will usually be given another appointment so you can be given the results of the biopsy. This is usually a couple of weeks later.

Should I be concerned?

It is natural to be worried about undergoing any operation, even a small one like this. Many patients jump to the worst conclusion and assume that biopsies are only ever taken when cancer is suspected. Please remember this is not the case. The majority of samples are confirmed as being benign (non-cancerous). If you are worried please tell the surgeon straight away. They can help reassure you and answer questions you may have. They will fully explain the procedure and process to you.

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