

Skin biopsy

Dermatology

Introduction

The aim of this leaflet is to explain what a skin biopsy is, why it is needed and how it is performed.

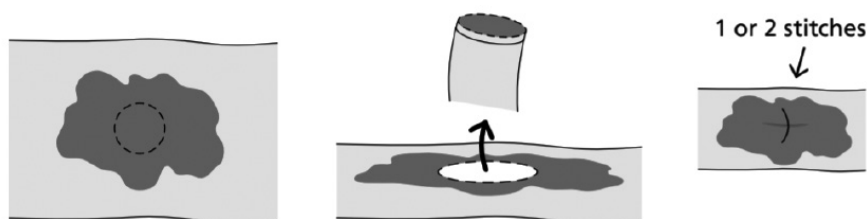
What is a skin biopsy?

A skin biopsy is a short procedure where a sample of skin is removed and sent to the Pathology laboratory to be analysed under the microscope.

What are the types of skin biopsy?

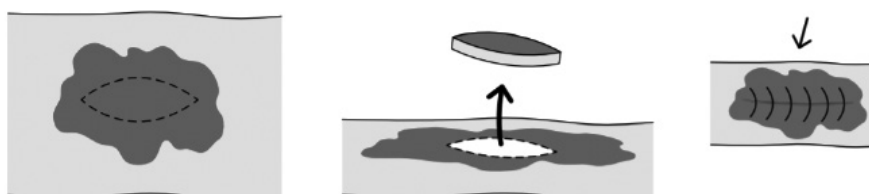
Punch biopsy

A small round bladed instrument is used to remove a round core of tissue ranging from 3 to 4mm in diameter (see diagram below). 1 or 2 stitches may be used, however, sometimes stitches are not used. You may have a small scar which appears as a 3 to 4mm fine line. Sometimes this heals as a circular indentation or puckering.



Incisional biopsy

A small eye-shaped piece of skin is removed. Stitches are used to close the area and you will have a small scar. The typical scar is a straight line that is around 1 to 5 centimetres depending on the size of the biopsy that is needed.

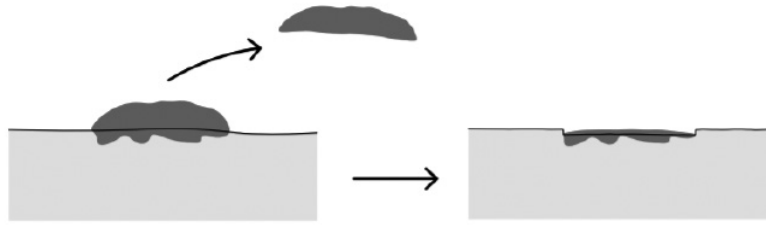


The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

Shave biopsy

During this biopsy, the surface of a lesion is shaved off. The roots of the lesion are not removed. A scab will form which will take a week to separate. Stitches are not used in this procedure. You will have a pale circular scar which is usually flat and the same outline as the base of the lesion that has been removed.



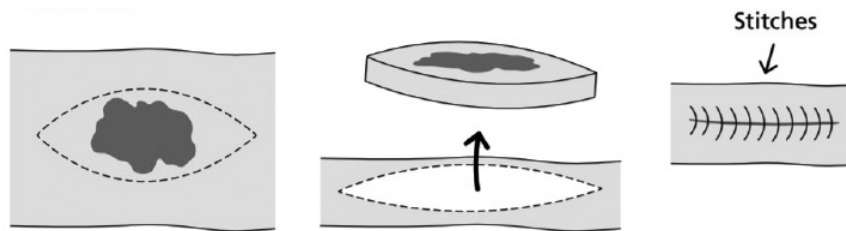
Curettage

The lesion is scraped off. A graze like area remains which scabs up and takes 1 to 2 weeks to heal (6 weeks on the lower legs). Stitches are not used. A pale patch resembling the outline of the lesion remains.



Diagnostic excision

A lesion and a small amount of normal skin around it are removed. Stitches are used. You will typically have a straight line scar that is usually 3 to 4 times the length of the lesion being removed.



Consent

We must seek your consent for any procedure or treatment beforehand. Your doctor will explain the risks, benefits and alternatives where relevant before they ask for your consent. If you are unsure about any aspect of the procedure or treatment proposed please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

What are the benefits of a skin biopsy?

A skin biopsy will help to diagnose your skin condition and plan treatment.

Risks

- **Scarring** – You will always have some sort of scar or permanent mark as it is impossible to cut the skin without leaving a mark. We will try to make the scar as neat and as unnoticeable as possible, though individuals vary in how well they heal following surgery. Certain individuals may have an abnormal response to skin healing and as a result may get larger raised scars than usual. These are known as keloid or hypertrophic scars. Limiting exercise or stretching for wounds on the back or limbs for at least 7 days will help the scar heal as finely as possible. Blood vessels (telangiectasias) can also form around scars

- **Bruising and swelling** – Bruising around the site is common and swelling can persist for 4 weeks
- **Bleeding** – It is normal to experience minor oozing of blood in the first 24 hours:
 - If your wound bleeds do not dab it, but press it gently but firmly without stopping for 15 minutes with a clean tissue, towel or dressing
 - If your wound is on your arm or leg, lift the limb upwards as this will help to stop the bleeding
 - If the wound is on your head, ensure that you are sitting upright and avoid bending forwards
 - If the bleeding does not stop, repeat the process for another 15 minutes
 - If the area is bleeding a lot, or does not stop by pressing it then please contact the Dermatology department (contact details at the end of the leaflet) or outside of working hours please attend A&E
- **Infection** – It is normal for a wound to be red after surgery. If the wound becomes redder over time, is inflamed, sore, painful or starts discharging yellow pus then it may be infected. Wound infections normally occur two to three days after the procedure. In this situation please contact the Dermatology department or GP for antibiotics
- **Numbness** – Numbness or altered sensation around scar is common. This usually recovers after several months but may be permanent. Occasionally numbness can extend to larger areas if sensory nerves have been cut during the procedure
- **Nerve damage** – This is very unlikely after a biopsy, although it can rarely occur. The anaesthetic we use can cause temporary blocking of a nerve and this will resolve within 24 hours. If you have numbness or muscle weakness for more than 24 hours after surgery please contact the Dermatology department

What are the alternatives to a skin biopsy?

If no alternatives suggest using 'The choice about which treatment is best for you will be made together with your doctor. This will be based on the risks and benefits of the treatment and your individual circumstances. The doctor will have explained the different treatment options to you and what will happen if you decide not to have any treatment at all.

How do I prepare for the skin biopsy?

To prepare for the procedure you should follow the steps below:

- Prepare a list of any tablets or medicines you are taking, note any allergies you have and bring this with you on the day of surgery. You should continue taking your normal medicine unless you have been specifically advised not to. Please read the section 'Important information if you are on Warfarin or other blood thinning medications'
- Continue taking Aspirin, Clopidogrel, Prasugrel, Ticagrelor and Dipyridamole (unless you have been specifically asked not to)
- Make sure you have a supply of painkillers available to you at home to take for discomfort after the operation, for example Paracetamol
- You should not drive following your surgery or travel unaccompanied. We advise you to bring someone with you to your appointment to take you home or travel back with you. If in doubt please seek advice from the doctor or nurse. It will be safe for you to drive the next day
- Eat and drink normally. It is better to have eaten at least a light snack within 2 hours before surgery to help prevent any feelings of nausea
- Wear loose clothing that is easy to remove if needed. Buttoned or zipped tops are easier to remove than clothing that must be pulled over the face. For procedures on the feet or lower legs, wear loose footwear or sandals that can accommodate dressings that may be used
- Please shower or bathe as normal before the procedure. Apply any creams and cosmetics as normal. Please do not apply covering makeup over the area due for biopsy

Important information if you are on Warfarin or other blood thinning medications

If you are on Warfarin, your INR (international normalised ratio) needs to be 2.5 or less for the procedure to be carried out. Please inform your anticoagulation service of this and the date your procedure will be on. You should arrange to have an INR test 5 days before your surgery date.

You should also follow the advice below:

- If the INR is 2.5 or less, 5 days before surgery, stay on the same dose of Warfarin. A further INR test is not required
- If the INR is greater than 2.5, 5 days before surgery, please ask your anticoagulation service to reduce your dose accordingly. Arrange a further INR test 1 or 2 days before the surgery if you can
- Bring your yellow Warfarin book with you to your surgery

If you are on Apixaban, Rivaroxaban, Edoxaban or Dabigatran, please continue to take these as usual unless you have been specifically advised not to by your doctor. Even though continuing these medications may increase the risk of bleeding after a skin biopsy, stopping these medications abruptly is more risky as this can lead to clot formation in the blood vessels in the heart or brain

Will I need to stop smoking or drinking alcohol?

To help the wound heal well after your procedure, you are advised to stop smoking 2 weeks before (where possible) and 2 weeks after the procedure. Alcohol should also be avoided 3 days before and 3 days after surgery as it may increase bleeding and cause poor wound healing.

Will I be seen at my appointment time?

Please ensure you arrive on time for your appointment. Every effort is made to see patients at their appointment time, but inevitably delays sometimes occur.

How long will my appointment last?

Please bring a book or newspaper with you to help pass the time. Most minor surgery takes less than an hour to perform, but you may need to remain within the department for up to an hour afterwards. Please allow plenty of time for your appointment.

What will happen on the day of the skin biopsy?

The doctor or nurse carrying out the procedure will explain the procedure to you and ask you to sign a consent form. It can be helpful to bring in a relative or friend to the procedure room for this discussion.

We ask that only one individual accompanies you. After you have had the opportunity to ask any questions, the person accompanying you will be asked to wait in the waiting room and you will be asked to lie on a couch. Please inform us if you require an interpreter.

It is very important that you tell the nurse or doctor about any medical conditions which may affect surgery, for example:

- A pacemaker / defibrillator
- A heart problem that requires antibiotic cover for dental or similar procedures
- A heart valve replacement
- A bloodborne infection
- Any allergies
- If you take immunosuppressant medication or blood thinning medication

Please read the section 'Important Information if you are on Warfarin or other blood thinning medications'.

A member of our team will undertake the biopsy, this may be a doctor or nurse specialist. The area to be biopsied will be numbed with an injection of local anaesthetic. This means you are awake during the procedure, and numbing injections are given to the area. You will not be sedated or feel drowsy. You may experience some discomfort for a minute or so. The procedure will be carried out once the skin is fully numb. You may feel a pushing sensation in the area but you should not feel any pain.

What will happen after the skin biopsy?

After the biopsy you should:

- Rest for 12 hours. Avoid strenuous activity for the first 2 days (longer if the biopsy is near a joint or on the back). If the wound is on your lower leg, you will need to rest with your leg elevated for 1-2 days, and limit exercise while healing. If you have a larger wound on your trunk or limbs, you will need to avoid sports, lifting and stretching for 4-6 weeks to avoid wound breakdown and scar stretching
- The local anaesthetic will wear off in one to two hours. Take regular Paracetamol if there is any discomfort (follow the instructions on the packet for the dose)
- If the wound has been covered with a dressing, you will be advised when it should be removed. Ideally it should not be disturbed until this time. Keep the dressing clean and dry
- If the wound has not been covered with a dressing it may have been smeared with an antibiotic ointment which you should not disturb for 24 hours. After this time you may gently wash the wound daily with tap water, patting but not rubbing it dry
- You will be advised if you need to return to Dressings Clinic for a wound check or removal of stitches. Depending on the procedure, stitches may be used, and these may be dissolvable or non-dissolvable

Advice on aftercare will be given before you leave the procedure room. You will also be given supplementary written information to take with you. It can be helpful to have a person present while the doctor or nurse goes through the aftercare advice. Please let the operating clinician know if you would like this.

When can I return to work?

For most small biopsies patients can attend work as normal the next day. If you do a physical job or are having a larger biopsy then the clinician on the day will advise you depending on your particular circumstances.

Will the surgery effect my mood?

The anaesthetic used for your biopsy will have no direct affect on your mood. Understandably patients may anxious before the procedure and have concerns around post-operative care. If patients have any concerns please discuss these with our staff.

How will I be informed of results?

All samples of skin removed are sent to the laboratory for analysis. This process normally takes a few weeks. We may:

- Write to you or telephone you with the results
- Arrange a further appointment in the Dermatology clinic

Where can I get further information?

The British Society for Dermatological Surgery has an comprehensive website with patient information, support groups and fact sheets. See - bsds.org.uk/patient-information.

Contact details

Dermatology Outpatients

Reception

01902 695073

01902 307999 Ext 88583

Opening times: Mon to Fri, 8:30am – 4:30pm

Skin Cancer Specialist Nurses:

Andrea & Tarsem

01902307999 Ext 88583

Secretary's

Dianne Rigby

Mon and Wed

01902 481754

Tues / Thurs / Fri

01543 576033

Debb Windsor

01543 576765

Carole Shaw

01543 576038

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。