

Ultrasound guided core biopsy of the breast and axilla

Information for patients

This leaflet explains what happens when you have an ultrasound guided core biopsy of the breast and axilla (armpit area). It discusses the benefits and risks of this procedure and tells you what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a radiologist or radiographer when you attend your appointment.

What is an ultrasound guided core biopsy of the breast / axilla?

An ultrasound guided core biopsy of the breast is a procedure in which a small sample of tissue is removed from the breast / axilla using a specialised biopsy needle so we can look at it under a microscope. An ultrasound scan is used to identify the area of the breast we need to look at and guide the biopsy needle to the correct position for tissue sampling.

Core biopsies are performed by consultant radiologists and consultant radiographers who are specially trained to do them.

What are the benefits – why should I have this procedure?

If changes in your breasts are detected by either a mammogram or ultrasound scan, the breast consultant may require a tissue sample (core biopsy) to identify what is causing the changes. These tissue samples will be analysed under a microscope and the results can help to confirm the diagnosis.

What are the risks?

Occasionally, after the biopsy, there may be some bleeding inside the breast / axilla and a bruise or swelling (haematoma) may form.

- You will be given a local anaesthetic before the procedure but you may still experience some pain.
- Severe bleeding rarely occurs but when it does may need to be treated with a surgical procedure. Care is taken during the procedure to minimise the risk of infection.

Care is taken to ensure that the needle does not pass beyond the breast through the chest wall. There is a very small risk of a lung puncture and collapse. We might need to treat this by inserting a small flexible tube into the chest to re-expand the lung.

Rare complications of axillary biopsies include damage to v blood vessels or nerves. Sometimes we might need to do another biopsy if more tissue is needed for diagnosis.

How can I prepare for a core biopsy?

No preparation is needed. You can eat and drink normally before and after the procedure.

- Please let the radiologist / radiographer know before the procedure if you are taking any antiplatelet medicines (such as aspirin or clopidogrel) or any medicines that thin the blood e.g. Warfarin, Apixaban, as you might need to stop taking these for a short time before your procedure.

- If you are allergic to any medication (particularly local anaesthetic), please inform the radiologist before the procedure.

Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. A doctor or radiographer will fully explain the procedure and obtain verbal consent if you agree to proceed.

What happens during the procedure?

The procedure is carried out in an ultrasound room. However, you should be prepared to be in the department for longer in case delays occur or you wish to take time to rest and recover after your procedure.

Once you are in the examination room, we will ask you to undress from the waist up and to lie on the examination couch.

We will do an ultrasound of the breast to work out where need to take a sample from. The consultant will clean this area of your breast before injecting local anaesthetic to numb the area.

Once the area is numb, a very small cut is made (3-4 mm) through which the biopsy needle is inserted into the breast. The ultrasound machine is used to guide the needle into the correct position. The biopsy needle is passed quickly into the breast and a narrow core of tissue is taken up into the needle. The needle is removed from the breast and the specimen retrieved. This process may be repeated several times.

After the biopsy one or more small metal (titanium) markers measuring about 3 mm may be placed in the breast to mark the biopsy site for future information. There are no known harmful effects from the metal markers and they do not need to be removed from the breast at any stage. The markers do not set off metal detectors at airports. Please let the radiologist know if you have any metal allergies.

When the procedure is finished, an assistant or radiographer will apply firm compression to your breast biopsy site for five minutes to help reduce the risk of bruising. A paper stitch (steristrip) will be placed over the biopsy site and covered with a sterile, dressing. After the dressing has been applied, you will be able to get dressed. A quiet room is available in the department if you need some time to rest after the procedure.

Will I feel any pain?

During the procedure the local anaesthetic may cause some stinging before it numbs the breast, but this should only last for a few seconds. You may feel some pressure on the breast during the procedure but you should not feel any pain. If you do feel pain, please tell the radiologist and more local anaesthetic can be given.

After one to three hours the local anaesthetic will start to wear off and your breast may feel tender or painful. If the area becomes particularly uncomfortable take a mild over the counter painkiller, such as paracetamol, following the instructions on the pack. Avoid taking medicines that contain aspirin, as these could cause additional bruising in the breast.

What happens after the procedure?

The samples will be sent to the laboratory to be analysed. Your results are usually back within 7-10 days. You will be given instructions on how to make follow up outpatient appointment to see the breast surgeon to receive your results.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You can go back to normal activity straight away but should avoid any strenuous activity, such as heavy lifting, jogging, and aerobics for the rest of the day. If your work is physical we advise light duties only for the rest of the day, and then back to normal duties the following day.

The dressing needs to be kept on the breast for **2-3 days**, after which you can take off. You shouldn't need another after this. Avoid getting the dressing wet for at least 24 hours. Refer to the aftercare sheet given to you after the procedure for more information.

What should I do if I have a problem?

You may notice some bruising at the biopsy site. This is to be expected and will go down over the next week or so.

Bleeding or swelling is rare but if it does happen please follow these instructions:

- Remove the dressing and apply pressure to the biopsy site.
- Do this firmly by pressing with the palm of your hand for 10 minutes using either tissues or cloth.
- If the bleeding or swelling continues after 15 minutes you should go to your GP or the Emergency Department (A&E) taking this leaflet with you.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Yes. An appointment will be arranged for you to come in and discuss the results.

**If you have any further questions, contact the Breast Care Unit on 01270 612396.
Open Monday to Friday, 8.50am – 4.50pm (excluding bank holidays).**

This information is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask a member of staff or telephone 01270 612396.