

Having a bone marrow biopsy – information for patients

Introduction

Your doctor has advised you that you need to have a sample of your bone marrow taken. This is called a bone marrow biopsy. Bone marrow is a spongy material that fills the bones and produces cells which develop into blood cells. The aim of this leaflet is to help you understand what happens when you have this test.

Your bone marrow biopsy will be on:

Day

Date.....

Time.....

At (department).....

If you think that you may be late, you cannot attend or you need to change your appointment, please let the Haematology Secretary know on 01270 273547.

Before you come

You do not need to do anything special to prepare for this test. You can eat and drink as normal. You do not need to bring anything with you for the test itself. As with any test you may be feeling anxious, so you are welcome to bring someone with you. You will be given a local anaesthetic before the biopsy. This means that you can drive after the test, although you may feel sore and may prefer to arrange for someone to drive you home. Otherwise you can continue with normal activities before and after the test.

The Biopsy

The doctor will explain the procedure to you fully, and there will be time for you to ask any questions. The staff will then ask you to complete a consent form to say that you agree to have the test.

The test is carried out by a doctor. It takes less than 30 minutes and no special preparation is needed.

The bone marrow sample is taken from the back of your hip bone. You will be asked to lie on your left side. You won't be asked to remove your clothing but you will need to expose the area by lowering your underwear. The area where the sample is taken will be cleaned with an antiseptic before you are given an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the area. You will feel a sharp stinging for a few seconds when you have this injection. More local anaesthetic is injected to surround the bone where the sample is taken.



Picture of a bone marrow sample being taken. Ref Macmillan.org.uk

Once the anaesthetic has started to work, another needle is passed into your bone marrow. You will feel the doctor pushing and you may feel the needle 'give', which may cause you to jump – this is normal. In most cases, no more than a few drops of liquid are withdrawn, although sometimes more is required for additional tests. Some people feel a stinging sensation and have some discomfort or pain but this lasts only for a few seconds. The doctor or nurse usually takes a further sample of the bone using the same needle entry site as before – if needed, more anaesthetic can be used. This takes a little longer than the first needle and once again can be painful but lasts only a few seconds.

A small dressing will be applied which can be removed later in the day or the next day.

Following the test you will be asked to rest for 10-15 minutes. Once the test is over you should not have any difficulty returning to your normal activities.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the benefits of this test?

This is a very safe and quick test that can help us find out exactly what is wrong and plan the best treatment for you.

Is there any alternative to a bone marrow biopsy?

No. This test is often essential to diagnose or rule out a problem with your bone marrow. Many patients who have a blood problem will need to have a bone marrow test at some time. This may be to help with the diagnosis or to see how the disease is responding to treatment. Of course, if you decide that you do not want this test then we will be more than happy to discuss this with you.

Does the test hurt?

This test is **not** completely pain free. The local anaesthetic injection will numb the area that surrounds the bone but cannot numb the bone itself. Although you may have some pain, this is for a very short time.

When you return home if you have any worries or concerns please do not hesitate to contact the Nurse Specialist.

You may experience aching for a few days in the area where the sample is taken. You can take mild painkillers such as Paracetamol tablets to relieve this.

Remember to follow the instructions on the packet.

How long will it take?

The actual test takes less than 30 minutes. It is difficult to say how long you will be at the hospital because this will depend on other things, such as how you are feeling, if you have other tests and how busy the department is at the time. We can only apologise if there are delays. We will do our best to keep to appointment times and let you know what is happening.

Are there any risks?

A bone marrow biopsy is a very safe test with few risks. Because the sample is taken from the back of your pelvis bone (at the back of the hip), there is no risk of damaging any major organs. (Very rarely we may need to take a sample from another site. If so, this will be discussed with you). There may be some bleeding but a dressing usually stops this. **If you are taking any medication to thin the blood please let the secretary know in advance on 01270 273547 before you have the biopsy.** You may also notice some bruising, but again this is normal and will fade. There is a very small risk of infection at the site of the biopsy. If you notice any swelling or redness please contact us if you are concerned. Less than 1 in 1000 people having this procedure will experience an infection.

When will I know the results?

Early results can take a day or two – further results are usually available within 2 weeks. If special tests are necessary the full results may take a little longer. Your results will be given at your next clinic appointment.

We know that waiting for your results can be a worrying time. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions or discuss any concerns you may have. We are only too happy to advise you.

**For advice and information, please contact
Macmillan Haematology Nurse Specialist on 01270 278017.
Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm.**

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This leaflet has been reviewed by the Readers' Panel June 2011.

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