

Information for patients having a Needle Biopsy

Rutherford
Cancer Centre North West

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Introduction

There are several different types of needles tests that can be done to take a biopsy from your breast. The type of test that will be recommended will depend on your particular breast problem.

Fine Needle Aspiration (FNA)

This text uses a fine needle to remove a sample of cells from inside the breast and/or under your arm (axilla) which will be looked at under the microscope. The test gives the doctor more information about the area being examined.

This is usually done with you lying down and the whole procedure will take about 10-15 minutes.

The needle test (FNA) can be done immediately if the doctor can feel the area in your breast that he /she wants to sample. The test can usually be done while you are in clinic, or you will be given an appointment to return to have this done.

If the area cannot be felt, the Radiologist (X-ray doctor) or Radiographer will do the FNA with the help of the X-ray (mammogram) or ultrasound machine to guide him / her to the exact area to be sampled.

If the test is to be done using X-ray guidance, this will be done with you sitting in a chair, and having your breast held in the X-ray machine whilst the needle is positioned. Further X-rays will be taken to ensure that the needle position is in the right place. This is called stereotactic FNA.

If the FNA is to be done using ultrasound guidance, this will be done with you lying on a couch.

Whichever method is used to find the area to be sampled in the breast, a very thin needle will then be passed into your breast or underarm (axilla) to take a sample of the cells.

As all patients are different, so is the discomfort that they may feel during the test. Most patients say this test is uncomfortable. A local anaesthetic may be given. Rarely does anyone get more than a little bruised discomfort but if so, then you can take a simple painkiller afterwards.

Core biopsy

A core needle biopsy may be performed in addition to FNA, or instead of this. This uses a slightly bigger needle and gives the doctors a sliver of tissue to look at under the microscope. It is often done at the same time as the FNA.

As with an FNA this is usually done with you lying down and the whole procedure will take about 20-30 minutes. The test can be done immediately if the Doctor can feel the area in your breast that he / she wants to sample.

An ultrasound machine is used to identify the area of the breast that requires examination and to guide the biopsy needle to the correct position for the procedure to take place. Core biopsies are performed by Radiologists and Sonographers that are specially trained.

A local anaesthetic will be used to “numb” the area. A small cut will then be made in the skin and a needle inserted to take a small piece of tissue from the breast. The instrument used makes a loud ‘click’ when the samples are taken. Several samples are usually taken.

When adequate samples have been obtained and the procedure is finished, firm compression will be applied to the breast biopsy site by a member of staff for five minutes to help reduce the risk of bruising. A paper stitch (steristrip) will be placed over the puncture site and covered with a sterile waterproof dressing.

As all patients are different, so is the discomfort that they may feel during the test. As local anaesthetic is always given the discomfort during the test should be minimal.

Mammotome biopsy

If the FNA and / or core biopsies are unhelpful or more information is needed about the area in your breast being examined, then you may be advised to have a mammotome biopsy. This may reduce the need for you to have an operation to help find out what is going on in your breast.

As this test usually takes about 45-60 minutes to do you will normally be given an appointment to return to have this done.

This test is also known as an image guided vacuum assisted biopsy as the Radiologist (X-Ray doctor) or specially trained Radiographer will do the test with the help of the X-ray (mammogram) or ultrasound machine to guide him / her to the exact area to be sampled.

It can be done with you either lying down or sitting depending on whether the ultrasound or mammogram machine is used.

A local anaesthetic will be used to “numb” the area and a small cut will then be made in the skin. A needle, with suction device attached, will be then inserted into the breast and small amounts of tissue will be sucked away through the needle. This is repeated until the Doctor feels that she/he has enough tissue.

When adequate samples have been obtained and the procedure is finished, firm compression will be applied to the breast biopsy site by a member of staff for five minutes to help reduce the risk of bruising. A paper stitch (steristrip) will be placed over the puncture site and covered with a sterile waterproof dressing. It is common for you to be quite bruised for some days after this procedure.

It usually takes about 5-8 working days to examine these samples and an appointment will be made for you to return to the clinic to discuss these results.

What happens after these tests?

Before you leave the clinic, you will be advised as to what to expect after the particular test that you have had done.

Sometimes it is necessary to leave a marker clip in the breast after biopsy has been done. This shows the place where the biopsy has been taken from. This clip is very small and is usually made from either titanium or porcelain and you will not be aware of it after the procedure is done. The clip will remain in the breast unless it is decided that surgery is needed to remove this area of the breast tissue in which case it may be removed at the time of surgery.

The clip is safe to leave in place and will not cause you any problems; it will not activate the alarm on body scanners at the airport, and if ever you require an MRI scan (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) it will not interfere with this test.

After any of these tests you may experience some tenderness or discomfort. This is quite normal and may be relieved by taking a mild painkiller, e.g. Paracetamol. Please do not take anything containing Aspirin as this may cause you to bruise even more.

There may be some bruising around the area. This is normal and should fade as any other bruise would. You may also be able to feel a small, hard lump in the area of the biopsy. This is simply a collection of blood which has formed into a solid bruise and is nothing to worry about. You may be more comfortable wearing a good supportive bra in bed for the first couple of nights as this can also help reduce bruising.

You can go back to normal activities straight away but you should avoid any strenuous activities such as heavy lifting, jogging and aerobics for a few days. If your work is physical, we advise light duties on for the day. If you take any antiplatelet medicines (for example Aspirin, Clopidogrel) or any medicines that thin the blood (for example, Warfarin) the Radiologist/Radiographer will discuss this with you before you go home.

You can bathe or shower as usual. You may find warm baths soothing but try to avoid hot baths and showers as this may make you bruise more.

If you are concerned about the amount of bruising, you have you can contact your GP or Nurse Specialist for advice.

For further information

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any information provided please contact the following:

Breast Care Nurse Specialist Team Telephone Number – 0151 459 0323

Monday – Friday 08:00 – 17:00 (Office Hours)

Out of hours

Telephone: 01183 383 984

Email

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