

# Skin biopsy using local anaesthetic

## Dermatology Department Patient Information Leaflet

### Introduction

This leaflet is for people who are considering having a skin biopsy. It describes the procedure, and the risks and benefits of it.

### What is a skin biopsy?

A skin biopsy is a surgical procedure in which a piece of skin is removed. You are given a local anaesthetic for the procedure. The biopsy is then examined under a microscope.

### What are the benefits?

The biopsy can be used by your doctor to diagnose your condition and propose suitable treatment.

### What happens during the procedure?

On the day of the surgery, a member of staff will ask you about any medical problems, medication and allergies. After this, the doctor will explain the procedure to you, as well as the risks, and ask you to sign a consent form.

The doctor will clean the surgery site with an antiseptic or saline (salt) solution and inject a local anaesthetic into the skin to numb the area. The anaesthetic usually used is called lidocaine.

The injection stings but this sensation lasts for only a few seconds. If the area is hairy, we may need to clip it. You will be fully awake for the procedure.

A sharp instrument is used to cut or scrape the skin. The size and shape of the piece of skin removed will depend on your condition. Your hospital doctor will discuss this with you. A procedure called cautery may be used to stop bleeding. Some wounds need to be stitched while others are like a graze and do not need stitches.

A dressing is usually applied at the end of the procedure.

## How long does it take?

The appointment usually lasts approximately 20 to 45 minutes.

## What happens next?

The sample of skin is sent to the laboratory for analysis under a microscope.

## What are the risks?

As with all surgery, this procedure carries some risks and complications. It is important that we tell you about these risks so that you have the information you need to make a decision about the procedure.

The common risks are:

- **Pain:** Once the skin is numb from the local anaesthetic, you will not feel any pain although you will feel pressure. When the local anaesthetic wears off, the wound may become sore. You can take a painkiller like paracetamol for this (always read the label; do not exceed the stated dose). The soreness usually improves gradually over one to two days.
- **Bleeding:** The surgeon will stop any bleeding during the procedure. Rarely, the wound bleeds after the surgery. If this happens, you should put a sterile gauze or clean handkerchief over and around the site and press firmly for 20 minutes. If the bleeding does not stop when you do this, please seek further advice (see the box below 'If you need advice').

- **Infection:** The wound may become infected. The symptoms of this are increasing pain, redness and swelling in and around the area. You may also have a yellowish discharge or fluid coming out of the wound. If you think you might have an infection, please seek further advice (see the box 'If you need advice').
- **Scar:** You will have a scar after the procedure. Your hospital doctor will discuss this with you. Surgery on some areas such as the chest and shoulders can sometimes result in lumpy scars.
- **Delayed or non-healing wound or ulceration:** Some wounds, particularly those on the lower leg, may take a long time to heal or may not heal after the procedure. If this happens, you will need to have regular dressing changes under the care of your dermatologist or GP, to help with healing.
- **Other risks:** If there are any risks that are unique to your condition, your hospital doctor will discuss these with you.

### **If you need advice, contact:**

9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday:

- Dermatology Department on 01384 244799 or
- Your GP

Outside normal working hours:

- NHS 111
- Your local walk-in or urgent care centre or
- Your nearest Emergency Department (A&E)

## **How do I prepare for the biopsy?**

It is a good idea to have a shower or bath before coming for the biopsy as after the surgery, you may be asked to keep the wound dry for a few days.

You can eat, drink and take your usual medication as normal. Continue taking any blood-thinning medication like aspirin, clopidogrel or rivaroxaban, unless you are given instructions not to.

If you are on warfarin, check with your skin doctor whether you need an INR test a few days before the surgery.

You can bring a relative or friend if you want. They can stay with you when the doctor is discussing the procedure and taking your consent. However, they will be asked to stay in the waiting area during the actual procedure.

Please bring a list of your medications and details of any allergies on the day of the biopsy. Tell the doctor on the day if you have a pacemaker.

If you have a holiday planned, please tell the doctor before the biopsy as it is best to have any stitches removed before going on holiday abroad. If this will not be possible, please discuss this with your doctor. If you need medical attention while you are abroad due to this surgery, this may have an impact on your travel insurance.

## **What happens after the biopsy?**

You may have to wait in the waiting area for approximately 10 to 20 minutes. A member of the nursing staff will then check that your wound is not bleeding and give you advice on looking after the wound, changing the dressing, showering and stitch removal.

You will be given a wound care information leaflet before leaving the department. This has the Dermatology Department contact phone number for any queries.

Eat, drink and take your medication as usual. Continue taking blood-thinning medication like aspirin, clopidogrel, rivaroxaban or warfarin, unless you are given instructions not to. If you smoke, consider stopping it as this will help your wound to heal. Please ask a member of the medical or nursing team if you want to be referred for advice on stopping smoking.

If a family member or carer is available to support you for a day or two after the procedure, please consider asking for their help if you need it.

If the biopsy has been taken from an area close to a joint, or if you have had a large piece of skin removed, take it easy with exercise, bending the area and lifting anything heavy (including shopping bags) until you have the stitches removed.

If possible, it is a good idea to avoid this for three to four weeks after. This reduces the risk of the stitches or the wound giving way. If your work involves these activities, consider discussing this with your employer.

Please keep the dressing clean and dry. Change the dressing as advised. If you have any stitches, these usually need to be removed after five to 14 days, depending on the area. Usually, this is carried out by the practice nurse at your GP surgery. You will need to arrange this.

## **Driving**

The DVLA advises that you can drive before and after skin surgery that is carried out under local anaesthetic, if you are safely able to control the vehicle. However, you should not drive if the surgery is performed around your eye and the swelling or dressing from it affects your vision.

As car insurance varies, it is important that you check with your insurance company as to whether the surgery has any impact on your cover.

## **How will I receive my results?**

If you need to be seen in clinic, an appointment will be arranged for you on the day. If you do not need to be seen in clinic again, your hospital doctor will send a letter to you and to your GP with the results.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please speak to a member of staff or contact:

Dermatology Department on 01384 244799 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/dermatology/>

Trust website: [www.dgft.nhs.uk](http://www.dgft.nhs.uk)

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta brosură poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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