

Having a vacuum assisted breast biopsy

This factsheet explains what is involved in having a vacuum assisted biopsy. Please allow up to two hours for this appointment.

Do I need to do anything special before the procedure?

There is no special preparation needed and you can eat and drink as usual. Please bring a list of your medication with you and make sure you take any regular medication as normal. It is helpful to wear a separate top, and skirt or trousers. After the procedure, we recommend you wear a non-wired supportive bra.

It is important that you tell us if you have any allergies or are having any treatment or medicine to thin your blood. If you are taking any medicine that thins your blood, for example, warfarin or apixaban, or you have a heart pacemaker, please let us know in advance.

What happens during the procedure?

When you arrive, we will explain the procedure and ask for your consent, however please do ask any questions that you may have. We will use the mammogram or ultrasound images to locate the area of breast tissue that needs to be sampled. This procedure may be done with you either lying down or sitting. We will inject local anaesthetic into the skin and the part of your breast to be biopsied. The injection will feel like a pinprick and may sting for a few seconds before the area goes numb.

A small cut will be made in the skin which the biopsy needle will pass through. Once in position, the needle stays in your breast while several samples are taken. This procedure should not be painful but you may feel a pushing sensation. If you do feel pain while the samples are being taken, please tell us straight away. When we have adequate samples, the needle will be removed. All the removed tissue will then be sent to the pathology department for examination.

Breast marker

We may place a very small metal marker in the breast to show where the biopsy has been done. The marker clip is inserted as part of the procedure after the samples have been taken. Inserting it is painless as your breast will still be numb from the local anaesthetic. You will not be able to feel the marker clip in your breast, either at the time of the procedure, or later on.

The clip will remain in your breast and will not cause you any harm. It will be seen on any future breast ultrasound scans or breast x-rays (mammograms). If you ever need an MRI (Magnetic



Resonance Imaging) scan, the marker clip will not cause any problem as it is compatible with MRI scans. If you have an allergy to metal, please tell us before the procedure.

What happens at the end of the procedure?

Once the biopsy has been taken, the assistant will press firmly over the area for about 10 minutes to stop any bleeding and reduce any bruising. Adhesive strips will be used to close the small cut on your breast and this will then be covered with a dressing. The adhesive strips and dressing should be left on and kept dry for three days. You may remove them after this time.

We may want to apply a pressure dressing or bandage. If we decide to do this, we will give you more information at the time. If a pressure bandage is applied, you should keep this on at least until you get home, but ideally for six hours after the procedure. We will ask you to stay in the department for half an hour after the procedure to ensure that you feel fine to go home.

What can I expect after the procedure?

As after any medical procedure you may experience some side effects. The possible side effects are explained below.

- **Bruising** – this is very common after this procedure. Bruising may make that part of your breast feel lumpy or may affect a wider area. On rare occasions there can be severe bruising - this may affect most of your breast and can take several weeks to resolve.
- **Aching or tenderness** – this should be relieved by taking a painkiller such as paracetamol. Avoid taking aspirin or ibuprofen for the first 24 hours. You may find it more comfortable to wear a non-wired supportive bra, day and night for two days.
- **Bleeding** – occasionally the biopsy site can start bleeding again after you have left the hospital. If this happens, apply firm pressure over the area for 20 minutes. If the bleeding has not stopped after 20 minutes, contact us or your GP (family doctor).

After this procedure you can resume normal activities, but avoid heavy lifting or exercise for 48 hours to reduce the risk of complications. If your work involves heavy lifting, we recommend that you take a couple of days off. You may continue to get brief episodes of pain or discomfort in your breast which can continue for many months after the biopsy.

When will I get the results of the biopsy?

We will make you an appointment to return to The Royal Marsden to get your biopsy results. This appointment is usually seven to 10 days after the procedure but may be sooner. Occasionally the result may be delayed and if this happens, we will attempt to contact you to arrange a new appointment.

Contact details

If you have any queries or concerns, please contact us:

Sutton: 020 8661 3845 / 3588

Chelsea: 020 7808 2813



Cavendish Square: 020 7811 8941

(Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

If you need medical advice outside of these hours, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

020 8915 6899

