

## Having a diagnostic biopsy

Your doctor has suggested that you have a procedure known as a biopsy. This information sheet explains why you need to have a biopsy and the possible risks and complications you may experience. If you are unsure about the benefits of having the procedure, please ask.

### What is a biopsy?

A biopsy is a procedure that involves numbing the area with lignocaine injection (local anaesthetic) and taking a sample or samples of tissue from the area needing further investigation. These are sent to be examined by a pathologist (an expert in making diagnoses from tissue samples).

### Why do I need a biopsy?

Your doctor's examination together with possible tests including ultrasound, CT or MRI scan, will have shown an area of abnormal tissue in your body. It is not always possible to tell the exact cause of the abnormality. The simplest and most accurate way of finding out is to take a tiny sample of the affected tissue for a pathologist to examine.

### Who has made the decision?

The consultant in charge of your case, and the doctor carrying out the biopsy will have discussed your situation and feel this is the best option for you.

### Where will it be done?

The biopsy will be carried out in the Outpatients Department at The Royal Marsden.

### How do I prepare for this?

There is no special preparation for this procedure. Please tell the doctor or the nurse if you are on any blood thinning drugs (anticoagulants) before the biopsy, for example, aspirin, warfarin, clopidogrel or rivaroxaban. We will ask you if you are allergic to tapes, plasters or drugs.

### What happens during the procedure?

You may have a friend or relative stay with you during the procedure. A doctor or nurse will ask you to remove any clothing covering the area to be biopsied, and will give you a hospital gown. The doctor will take the biopsy and a nurse will assist. The procedure can take 15 to 30 minutes to complete.



The team will try to make you as comfortable as possible. We will ask you to lie in a position that allows the biopsy to be taken safely. If certain types of movement or position are difficult, please tell the staff.

The area to be investigated will be numbed with local anaesthetic, using a fine needle. You may feel a stinging sensation as the local anaesthetic is given.

Once the area is numb, the doctor will make a small cut in your skin and insert the biopsy needle to take a sample/or samples of tissue. The biopsy needle makes a loud clicking sound as it takes a sample. Several samples will be taken. We will check with you throughout the procedure that you remain pain free. Most people feel only pressure but no pain. After the samples have been taken, the nurse will apply pressure to the area before securing a dressing.

### **Are there any complications?**

- Allergic reactions are rare due to the type of local anaesthetic we use. However, you may experience skin redness or rash. If you feel a local reaction occurring, please inform the staff.
- Very rarely, a wound may bleed a little after you have left the hospital. You should apply direct pressure to the wound for at least 10 minutes. The wound should then stop bleeding.

### **What happens afterwards?**

You should keep the dressing on for 24 hours and take it off in the bath or shower. Keep the area clean for the next 24 hours. Occasionally it is necessary to use a more substantial pressure dressing. If this is the case, we will give you extra instructions at the time.

Most people feel fine to travel home following the procedure and can return to their normal routine. However, we recommend that you should avoid strenuous exercise for 24 hours to give the wound time to heal. After the procedure, you may experience some tenderness and bruising in the biopsied area. This is normal. To help with the tenderness, you may take a regular over the counter painkiller such as paracetamol (not aspirin or ibuprofen). The bruising should get better within a week.

### **When can I expect my result?**

The result of the biopsy can take 7-14 working days. We will give you an appointment to receive the result before you leave clinic. Rarely, if the results are not clear (usually this is for technical reasons) we may have to repeat the biopsy using ultrasound or CT scanning.

### **Contact details**

If you have any concerns, please contact:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 0208 915 6899  
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

