

## Having an ultrasound breast axilla (and/or ultrasound guided diagnostic procedure)

You have been referred by your doctor to have an ultrasound examination. This leaflet explains what will happen during your ultrasound and how to prepare.

Please note that as part of your ultrasound examination, your doctor who has examined you, or the breast specialist (sonographer, radiographer or doctor) who performs your scan, may recommend that you have an ultrasound guided breast core biopsy or fine needle aspiration. This leaflet will help you understand why the procedure may be necessary and what to expect.

### What is an ultrasound scan?

An ultrasound scan uses sound waves (not x-rays) to create pictures of organs and structures inside your body. A small handheld sensor (transducer) moves over your skin. The sound waves bounce back from your organs, and a computer turns these into images on a screen. These images help doctors make a diagnosis, plan your treatment, or monitor your condition. Ultrasound is considered very safe.

### Is there any preparation?

There is no special preparation for your ultrasound, you may eat or drink as normal.

### Are there any risks?

There are no known risks associated with diagnostic ultrasound. It is considered very safe. If you are having a scan involving a dye injection or a guided biopsy, your clinician will explain any specific risks prior to the procedure.

### What happens when I come for the scan?

You will meet the radiology staff who will welcome you and fully explain the procedure. We will ask you to remove the top half of your clothing in the changing area and put on a hospital gown. The room lights may be dimmed so the pictures are easier to see. A small amount of gel is applied to your skin to help the transducer make contact. We recognise that this is an intimate procedure and we will try our best to make you comfortable.

### Will it hurt?

Ultrasound scans are not painful. You may feel gentle pressure from the transducer.

### How long will it take?

Most scans take about 15 minutes. Some may be shorter or longer depending on the area being examined and whether any additional procedures are needed.



### **What happens after the ultrasound?**

You can leave the department as soon as the examination is complete. There are no after-effects, and you may resume normal activities immediately, unless you have been told otherwise. Your images will be reviewed by the specialist who has performed your examination, and a report will be sent to your referring clinician. They will discuss the results with you at your next appointment.

### **[Having an ultrasound guided breast/axilla diagnostic procedure](#)**

#### **What is an ultrasound guided diagnostic procedure?**

An ultrasound guided diagnostic procedure uses ultrasound imaging as a guide to obtain a sample from affected area for further tests. The two most common procedures are:

##### **Biopsy**

A biopsy is a procedure that involves taking a small sample of tissue from an area needing further investigation. The area is numbed with a local anaesthetic injection. This is to ensure that you do not feel any pain and are as comfortable as possible during the procedure. A small cut is made in the skin, and a special biopsy needle is inserted to obtain a sample of tissue which is then sent to the laboratory for further tests.

##### **Fine needle aspiration (FNA)**

A fine needle aspiration is a procedure that involves taking a sample of cells from the area needing further investigation. This procedure is done with a blood test needle and usually you will not need a local anaesthetic, however you will be advised if it is recommended. The sample of cells is taken, and the breast specialist will determine whether this needs to be sent to the laboratory for further tests.

#### **Will I need an ultrasound guided breast diagnostic procedure?**

This will depend on the reason why you are having an ultrasound and/or what the ultrasound images are showing. Other tests that you have had may have shown an area around your breast or axilla that needs further investigation. From the scans (ultrasound, CT, MRI, etc.), it is not always possible to determine what an abnormal area is. In this case, it is necessary to obtain a sample for a laboratory test.

You may be recommended that an ultrasound guided diagnostic procedure is needed by the doctor who has examined you, or by the breast specialist who has scanned you. This will be based on the clinical query for your examination or on what the ultrasound images are showing.

#### **What happens during an ultrasound guided diagnostic procedure?**

You may request to have your friend or relative stay with you during the procedure. We will explain the procedure and ask for your consent.

A breast specialist will take the sample(s) with the support of an assistant. The procedure can take 15 to 30 minutes to complete. We will ask you to lie on your back on the ultrasound couch. Your affected side will be slightly raised and your arm above your head. Please tell the staff if this position is likely to be difficult for you because of any shoulder, back or neck problems. The breast specialist will have performed a scan with the ultrasound to familiarise themselves with the area.



They may need to reposition you. We will ask if you have any allergies. The area to be investigated will then be numbed with local anaesthetic, if appropriate, given we are using a very fine needle. You may feel a slight stinging as the local anaesthetic is given, but this will wear off quickly.

**If you are having a biopsy,** they will inject the area with local anaesthetic. When the area is numb, a small cut will be made in the skin and, using the ultrasound as a guide, the biopsy needle will be inserted into your breast or axilla to obtain an adequate sample. This may take several minutes. This procedure should not be painful, but you may feel a pushing sensation and internal movements. If you do feel pain while the samples are being taken, please tell us straight away. After the samples have been taken, an assistant will apply pressure to the area before securing a dressing over the wound.

**If you are having an FNA,** the breast specialist will insert the blood test needle using the ultrasound as a guide into the area to be investigated. This can take several minutes. After the sample has been taken, an assistant will apply pressure to the area before applying a plaster.

### **Is there any additional preparation for an ultrasound guided diagnostic procedure?**

There is no special preparation for this procedure. Please tell the assistant or breast specialist in the ultrasound room if you are taking any anticoagulation drugs (for example aspirin, apixaban, heparin, warfarin or clopidogrel) before your procedure.

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

- Allergic reactions are rarely seen due to the type of local anaesthetic we use. However, you may experience skin redness, rash or hives.
- Very rarely a wound might begin to bleed a little after you have left the hospital. You should apply direct pressure to the wound for twenty minutes. The wound should then stop bleeding. If for any reason the wound continues to bleed, you need to contact the Royal Marsden hotline (details below) and/or attend your nearest A&E.

### **What happens after the ultrasound guided diagnostic procedure?**

The assistant will press firmly over the area for a few minutes to stop any bleeding and reduce any bruising.

If a **biopsy** has been performed, sticky paper strips and a self-adhesive waterproof dressing will be applied to the wound. You should keep the dressing on for 72 hours, after which it can be removed along with the sticky paper strips. Please keep your wound clean and dry during the first 72 hours. Occasionally it is necessary to use a more substantial pressure dressing. If this is the case, we will give you any extra instructions at the time, and this is advised to remain on for no longer than 24 hours.

For **FNAs**, a plaster is used which can be removed after one hour.

Most people feel fine following the procedure and return to their normal routine straight away. However, we recommend that you avoid strenuous exercise for 24 hours to give the wound time to heal. You should feel fine to drive home.

A follow-up appointment will be arranged to receive the result of your biopsy or FNA before you leave.



**What can I expect after the ultrasound guided diagnostic procedure?**

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

**Bruising** – this is common and may make the area feel lumpy.

**Aching or tenderness** – if you are experiencing tenderness around the affected area, this can be relieved by taking a painkiller such as paracetamol.

**Where can I get further information?**

The staff in the Radiology department will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Please ask at the time of your appointment or telephone the department at any time.

**Sutton – Rapid Diagnostic Centre** 020 8661 3589 / 3588

**Chelsea – Rapid Diagnostic Assessment Centre** 020 7811 8366

**Cavendish Square – Radiology** 020 7811 8941

If you feel unwell or have concerns about your health, please contact:

**The Royal Marsden Hotline** 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments. This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

