

# Breast Biopsy

## What is a breast biopsy?

A breast biopsy is a procedure to remove a small piece of tissue from your breast. The tissue is sent to a lab to check for cancer or other disease. If it is cancer, lab tests may be able to tell how quickly the cancer may grow and what treatments may work best.

The biopsy helps your healthcare provider make a more accurate diagnosis and determine the right treatment for you.

## When is it used?

Your healthcare provider may do a breast biopsy if:

- You have a lump in your breast.
- You have a mammogram or ultrasound scan that shows an abnormal area.
- One of your nipples has signs of a problem, such as crusting, sores, dimpling of the skin, or bleeding.

Ask your healthcare provider to explain why you are having the procedure and any risks.

## How do I prepare for this procedure?

- Plan for your care. Depending on what type of biopsy you have, you may need to find someone to give you a ride home after the procedure.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you have had any reactions to iodine-containing foods or chemicals, such as seafood or X-ray contrast dye.
- Your provider may ask you to bathe before the biopsy. Give special attention to the area around your breasts and armpits.
- You may or may not need to take your regular medicines the day of the procedure, depending on what they are and when you need to take them. Some medicines (like aspirin or blood thinners such as Coumadin) may increase your risk of bleeding during or after the procedure. Tell your healthcare provider about all medicines and supplements that you take. Ask your healthcare provider if you need to avoid taking any medicine or supplements before the procedure.
- Follow any other instructions your healthcare provider gives you.
- Ask any questions you have before the procedure. You should understand what your healthcare provider is going to do. You have the right to make decisions about your healthcare and to give permission for any tests or procedures.

## What happens during the procedure?

There are different types of breast biopsies:

**Needle biopsy** is often done in your healthcare provider's office or in a mammography center. An X-ray or ultrasound is used to find the best place to put the needle.

- **Fine needle aspiration:** A needle is inserted through your skin into the lump or area of concern to remove a sample of cells.
- **Core biopsy:** A larger needle is used to remove a tubelike sample of tissue, about the size of a pencil lead.

**Surgical biopsy** may be done in an outpatient surgery center or hospital. Before surgery, you may be sent to the X-ray department so that your breast can be marked with a small wire placed in the area to be checked.

- An incisional breast biopsy is surgery to remove part of a lump in your breast for testing.
- An excisional biopsy removes the whole lump.

The type of biopsy you have depends on the size, location and type of lump. You will be given local or general anesthesia to keep you from feeling pain during the procedure. Local anesthesia numbs the part of your breast where you will have the biopsy. Before the procedure you may be given medicine to help you relax, but you will be awake during the procedure. General anesthesia relaxes your muscles and you will be asleep.

## What happens after the procedure?

Depending on which type of biopsy you have, you may be able to go home right away, or you may need to stay in the surgery center or hospital for an hour or so after the procedure.

Ask your healthcare provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid, including how much weight you can lift and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

## What are the risks of this procedure?

Your healthcare provider will explain the procedure and any risks. Some possible risks include:

- Anesthesia has some risks. Discuss these risks with your healthcare provider.
- You may have infection, bleeding, or blood clots.

- If the whole lump is not removed, surgery may be needed if cancer is found.
- After a biopsy, you may have a scar in the area. A scar may make it harder for you to feel any new lumps in that area of your breast. You may also have a hard area on your breast caused by scar tissue and stitches. This will soften with time.

Every procedure or treatment has risks. Ask your healthcare provider how these risks apply to you. Be sure to discuss any other questions or concerns that you may have.

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