



Breast Core Biopsy

Patient Information

What is a breast core biopsy?

A Breast Core Biopsy is where a special needle is inserted into the breast to take a small sample of breast tissue from an area of concern so that it can be sent to a pathologist for testing.

How do I prepare for a breast core biopsy?

Generally no preparation is needed. You should bring any recent breast imaging (mammograms and/or ultrasounds) and reports for the doctor performing the procedure to review before doing the biopsy. It is advisable to have someone drive you home afterwards.

Do not wear talcum powder on the day of the biopsy as these talc particles can mimic or imitate calcium spots in the breast which make it harder for the radiologist to identify the abnormality that requires biopsy. You might consider the clothes you wear on the day so you only need to remove clothes from the upper part of your body.

When you make your appointment for the breast core biopsy, you need to let the radiology clinic or department know if you are taking any blood thinning medication, such as aspirin, warfarin, clopidogrel, dabigatran, prasugrel, dipyridamole or asasantin. Blood thinning medications may need to be stopped for a period of days, or your normal dose reduced, before this procedure is carried out. It is very important that you do not stop any of these medications or change the dose without consulting both the radiology clinic or department and your own doctor. They will give you specific instructions about when to stop and restart the medication.

What happens during a breast core biopsy?

You will be called through for the biopsy by the Nurse, Sonographer or Mammographer. The procedure will be explained to you and consent will be obtained.

The area of concern is identified either by ultrasound or mammogram for stereotactic. The area is then cleaned with antiseptic and injected with local anaesthetic. A small nick or cut is made in the skin and the biopsy needle is gently inserted into the breast. Several samples are taken. When each sample is taken there is a clicking noise, and you may have a feeling of pressure in the breast where the sample is taken. The biopsy procedure may sometimes feel uncomfortable but is not usually painful because of the local anaesthetic that has been given.

After the samples have been taken, the biopsy area will be pressed on firmly for a few minutes to reduce bruising and bleeding, and then covered with a dressing.

Are there any after effects of a breast core biopsy?

The area that has been biopsied may feel a little tender for several days and there is usually some bruising. If the biopsy area is painful you can take paracetamol. Aspirin is not recommended because it thins the blood and can increase bruising or bleeding at the biopsy site. You should avoid vigorous physical exercise or heavy lifting for 24 hours after the procedure as this may make the bruising worse.

The small nick or cut that was made for the biopsy usually heals over in a few days and you will have a tiny scar less than 5mm in size that will be barely visible once healed.

How long does a breast core biopsy take?

The time taken for the procedure varies according to how the biopsy is done. For example, an ultrasound guided core biopsy may take only 20 minutes. A mammographic guided core biopsy (also called a "stereotactic") may take up to an hour.

What are the risks of a breast core biopsy?

You will usually have some bruising at the biopsy site and sometimes this may take several weeks to disappear.

There is a very small risk of infection. In the very unlikely event that the biopsy site becomes infected, a course of antibiotics may be required from your doctor.

Contact your doctor if you experience excessive swelling, bleeding, have fluid draining from the wound, redness or heat in the breast after the biopsy.

Doing a biopsy of tissue, especially if it is located deep within the breast, carries a slight risk that the needle (or probe) will pass through the chest wall, allowing air around the lung that could collapse a lung. This complication is a rare occurrence and is called a pneumothorax.

What are the benefits of a breast core biopsy?

A Breast Core Biopsy is a way of getting accurate information without an operation to surgically remove the tissue for testing.

Who does the breast core biopsy?

A Breast Core Biopsy is performed by a radiologist (an experienced specialist doctor).

How do I get my results?

A written report of the procedure will be given to your doctor by our radiologist. A written report of the pathology findings will be sent to your doctor by the pathology company used to analyse the core tissue.

After care procedure

Although we try to avoid all complications, some discomfort and tenderness will follow a core biopsy.

Immediately following the biopsy we will apply pressure for several minutes in order to minimise bruising. A dressing will be applied which should be kept in place for two days. This dressing is waterproof and you are able to wash with this on. Following a core biopsy, steristrips may also be applied which will help to avoid a scar.

Try to avoid strenuous exercise for 24 hours following the biopsy. Heavy weights should be particularly avoided.

After the procedure you are likely to feel minor discomfort for two to three days. It is recommended that you use a frozen ice pack on the site to help reduce pain and inflammation.

If you feel discomfort paracetamol can be taken to assist in easing the pain. However please avoid aspirin and or ibuprofen, as these have a blood thinning effect and may increase bruising.

It is common for bruising to appear at the site of the biopsy and usually resolves in one to two weeks.

