

Breast Biopsy

A breast biopsy is a procedure in which a sample of breast tissue is removed from the breast and examined under a microscope to see if cancerous cells are present. You may need a breast biopsy if you have:

- Any undiagnosed breast mass (*tumor*).
- Nipple abnormalities, dimpling, crusting, or ulcerations.
- Abnormal discharge from the nipple, especially blood.
- Redness, swelling, and pain of the breast.
- Calcium deposits (*calcifications*) or abnormalities seen on a mammogram, ultrasound results, or MRI results.
- Abnormal changes in the breast seen on your mammogram.

If the breast abnormality is found to be cancerous (*malignant*), a breast biopsy can help to determine what the best treatment is for you. There are many different types of breast biopsies. Talk with your health care provider about your options and which type is best for you.

Tell a health care provider about:

- Any allergies you have.
- All medicines you are taking, including vitamins, herbs, eye drops, creams, and over-the-counter medicines.
- Any problems you or family members have had with anesthetic medicines.
- Any blood disorders you have.
- Any surgeries you have had.
- Any medical conditions you have.
- Whether you are pregnant or may be pregnant.

What are the risks?

Generally, this is a safe procedure. However, problems may occur, including:

- Discomfort. This is temporary.
- Bruising and swelling of the breast.
- Changes in the shape of the breast.
- Bleeding.
- Infection.
- Damage to other tissues.
- Allergic reactions to medicines.
- Needing more surgery.

What happens before the procedure?

Medicines

Ask your health care provider about:

- Changing or stopping your regular medicines. This is especially important if you are taking diabetes medicines or blood thinners.

- Taking medicines such as aspirin and ibuprofen. These medicines can thin your blood. **Do not** take these medicines unless your health care provider tells you to take them.
- Taking over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, and supplements.

Lifestyle

- **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco, such as cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and chewing tobacco. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.
- **Do not** drink alcohol for 24 hours before the procedure.
- Wear a good support bra to the procedure.

Eating and drinking restrictions

Talk to your health care provider about when you should stop eating and drinking.

- You may be asked not to drink or eat for 2–8 hours before the breast biopsy.
- In some cases, you may be allowed to eat a light breakfast.

General instructions

- Plan to have someone take you home from the hospital or clinic.
- Ask your health care provider how your surgical site will be marked or identified.
- Ask your health care provider what steps will be taken to help prevent infection. These may include:
 - Removing hair at the surgery site.
 - Washing skin with a germ-killing soap.
- Your health care provider may do a procedure to locate and mark the tumor area in your breast (*localization*). This will help guide your surgeon to where the biopsy or incision is made. This may be done with:
 - Imaging, such as a mammogram, ultrasound, or MRI.
 - Insertion of special wire, clip, seed, or radar reflector implant in the tumor area.

What happens during the procedure?

- You may be given one or more of the following:
 - A medicine to numb the breast area (*local anesthetic*).
 - A medicine to help you relax (*sedative*).
 - A medicine to make you fall asleep (*general anesthetic*).
- Your health care provider will perform the biopsy using only one of the following methods. He or she will do:
 - Fine needle aspiration. A thin needle with a syringe will be inserted into a breast cyst. Fluid and cells will be removed.
 - Core needle biopsy. A wide, hollow needle (*core needle*) will be inserted into a breast lump multiple times to remove tissue samples or cores.
 - Stereotactic biopsy. X-rays and a computer will be used to locate the breast lump. The surgeon will use the X-ray images to collect several samples of tissue using a needle.
 - Vacuum-assisted biopsy. A small incision will be made in your breast. A hollow needle and vacuum will be passed through the incision and into the breast tissue. The vacuum will gently draw abnormal breast tissue into the needle to remove it.

- Ultrasound-guided core needle biopsy. An ultrasound will be used to help guide the core needle to the area of the mass or abnormality. An incision will be made to insert the needle. Then tissue samples will be removed.
- Surgical biopsy. An incision will be made in the breast to remove part or all of the abnormal tissue. After the tissue is removed, the skin over the area will be closed with sutures and covered with a dressing. There are two types of surgical biopsies:
 - Incisional biopsy. The surgeon will remove part of the breast lump.
 - Excisional biopsy. The surgeon will attempt to remove the whole breast lump or as much of it as possible.

After any of these procedures, the tissue or fluid that was removed will be examined under a microscope.

The procedure may vary among health care providers and hospitals.

What happens after the procedure?

- You will be taken to the recovery area. If you are doing well and have no problems, you will be allowed to go home.
- You may have a pressure dressing applied on your breast for 24–48 hours. You may also be advised to wear a supportive bra during this time.
- **Do not** drive for 24 hours if you were given a sedative during your procedure.

Summary

- A breast biopsy is a procedure in which a sample of breast tissue is removed from the breast and examined under a microscope to see if cancerous cells are present.
- This is a safe procedure, but problems can occur, including bleeding, infection, pain, and bruising.
- Ask your health care provider about changing or stopping your regular medicines.
- Plan to have someone take you home from the hospital or clinic.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.