

## Patient information

# Dermatology - skin biopsy

A skin biopsy is when your dermatologist removes a piece of skin and sends it to a pathology laboratory where a histopathologist analyses it under the microscope.

### Why do you need to have a skin biopsy?

Skin biopsies are performed to help with the diagnosis of your skin condition. Sometimes, different skin conditions can look similar to one another, so additional information is required. This is obtained by looking at the structure of the skin under the microscope after the cells have been stained with special-coloured dyes.

There are two situations in which this usually occurs:

- To distinguish between different types of rashes or skin lesions. Your dermatologist may be considering several possible diagnoses, and the skin biopsy provides additional information.
- To diagnose a lump in the skin. A biopsy is taken to determine if a skin cancer is present and help decide the best treatment.

**Please tell us in advance if you are on any anticoagulant such as warfarin, clopidogrel, rivaroxaban, apixaban, edoxaban or aspirin (please note this list is not exhaustive). Additionally, please inform us if you have a pacemaker, or if you are allergic to local anaesthetic, or plasters.**

### What is involved in having a skin biopsy?

Your dermatologist/specialist nurse will explain to you why the skin biopsy is needed, and the procedure involved. You will be asked to sign a consent form to indicate that you consent to the surgical procedure.

The skin will be cleaned with antiseptic and local anaesthetic will be injected into the area surrounding the lesion to be treated. The injection stings for a minute or two as it works. The skin will go numb so no pain should be felt during the procedure. You may feel a pushing sensation, but this should not be painful.

**Incisional biopsies** - are used when a larger piece of skin is needed to make a correct diagnosis. Stitches are usually required after an incisional biopsy.

**Punch biopsies** - take a small round core of tissue about 3-4mm in size. More than one punch biopsy may be required depending on the condition being investigated. Sometimes a stitch will be required or, if the wound is small, it may heal adequately without one.

There may be some bleeding in the area from where the lesion has been removed. The doctor may coagulate the blood vessels with electrocautery (heat treatment).

## **Will I have a scar?**

It is impossible to cut the skin without scarring in some way, so you will always have some sort of scar, however it is usually very small. Some people have an abnormal response to skin healing and these people may get larger scars than usual (keloid or hypertrophic scarring). This is more common in teenagers and is a particular problem on the shoulders, back and chest.

## **What do I do after the skin biopsy?**

You will be given an information sheet at the time of surgery, informing you how to look after the area.

- Your wound may become tender 1-2 hours after the procedure, when the local anaesthetic has worn off. Make sure you have some paracetamol at home, this is usually better than aspirin, which can increase bruising.
- You will need to keep the wound dry for at least 48 hours.
- You may need a supply of plasters and some antiseptic cream such as Savlon.
- You should avoid strenuous exertion and stretching of the area.
- The wound will take approximately 2-3 weeks to heal. The scar will initially appear red and raised but usually reduces in colour and size over several months.

## **What can I do to reduce the risk of infection?**

Have a shower or bath the day before and on the day of the procedure. Do not shave around the area of the operation. If hair removal is needed it is best done immediately before the procedure by the dermatologist or nurse.

## **How do I find out the results of analysis of the lesion?**

For some patients we make an appointment to come back to the clinic for the results. However, sometimes we communicate your results by letter or phone. The results may take several weeks to become available. If by 6-8 weeks after the surgery, you have not been contacted, please contact the Dermatology department.

## **General advice**

**If you are unable to attend for your appointment, please contact the dermatology minor operations bookings administrator on 01284 713853, as soon as possible.**

The surgery will take about 15-40 minutes. Waiting times are unpredictable so please leave plenty of time.

You may eat and drink as normal before the skin surgery. You may bring a friend with you, but they will not usually be allowed into the theatre.

You must get someone to drive you home. Although you may feel well enough to drive home, we have heard that some insurance companies would not cover you for an accident if it were immediately following a procedure. If you have no option other than public transport, we advise you have a companion with you. For larger procedures we advise against taking public transport.

Please wear clothing that is loose enough to allow a dressing to be applied underneath. You may need to take pain killers such as paracetamol after the procedure, make sure you have a supply of these and also some dressings or plasters at home.

**If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities, please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo) <https://www.accessable.co.uk>**



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