

Breast Screening Service

X-ray guided vacuum assisted breast biopsy

Information for patients



It is important that you understand what will happen during this procedure and why it is required. This leaflet should answer many of the questions you may have.

Why do I need a vacuum biopsy?

Your mammogram has shown an abnormality in your breast.

What is a vacuum biopsy?

A vacuum biopsy is a method of taking a sample of tissue from your breast. Gentle suction is applied to the device during the procedure allowing removal of more tissue than a standard biopsy. This procedure aims to reduce the likelihood of you having to have an operation to make a diagnosis of the abnormality in your breast.

Who will perform the biopsy?

The biopsy will be performed by an Advanced Practitioner Radiographer who is specially trained to do this test.

Is any special preparation required?

Please tell us straight away if you are taking any medication to thin your blood (eg Aspirin, Warfarin or Clopidogrel).

Please let us know about any allergies.

What does a vacuum biopsy entail?

Depending on the area of the breast we need to biopsy, you will be sitting or lying down and your breast will be compressed in the x ray machine during the procedure.

Further images will be obtained to accurately locate the breast abnormality. It is important that you keep very still.

Your skin will be cleaned. Local anaesthetic will be injected, which stings for a few moments as it takes effect and numbs the area, A small nick will be made in the skin (5mm or so in size) to allow the biopsy needle to be inserted.

The biopsy needle stays in the breast until all the samples have been obtained. The equipment makes a variety of noises during the procedure.

Once enough samples have been obtained, it may be necessary to insert a tiny metallic (titanium) clip. This will mark the biopsy site in case we need to locate the area in the future. The clip is safe, can be left in the breast indefinitely and will not prevent/impair any future tests. If a clip is inserted, a further mammogram will be performed to check its position in the breast.

What happens after the procedure?

After the biopsy, firm pressure will be applied to the breast to minimise bruising, and a dressing will be applied. You will be given aftercare advice.

We ask that you remain in the Breast Imaging Department for a further 20-30 minutes. Before you leave, your dressing will be checked and a clinic appointment will be made or confirmed for you to get the results of your biopsy (usually 7-10 days afterwards).

Generally you can resume normal activities after this procedure, but we advise you to avoid strenuous activities for about 48 hours.

Are there any risks or adverse effects?

It is normal to get some bruising. You may even notice some swelling or a lump at the biopsy site. This can take a week or two to completely settle.

You may feel aching or discomfort after the local anaesthetic has worn off. Simple painkillers i.e. paracetamol should suffice, but avoid taking aspirin for pain relief as this may make any bruising worse.

Occasionally, because a biopsy sample has been obtained, skin indentation/dimpling can occur at the site of the biopsy.

Very occasionally the skin may tear, and it may be necessary to place stitches at the biopsy site.

If your biopsy site begins to bleed apply firm pressure with a clean cloth i.e, handkerchief for 10 minutes. Do not remove the existing dressing.

As with any procedure where needles are inserted into the body, there is a very small risk of introducing infection.

Contact details

If you need to contact us;

Breast Screening Unit, Seacroft Hospital - Tel: 0113 733 4974

Mon - Fri 8.45am-5.00pm

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