

## Biopsy Information sheet

Biopsy is a medical procedure where a sample of tissue is taken from a patient for examination and diagnosis of an illness or medical condition. Many different biopsy procedures exist depending on the location of the tissue under investigation.

Once the tissue has been removed, it is usually placed in a preservative and sent to a pathology laboratory where it is set in wax and finely sliced. The slices are mounted on a glass slide and stained with various dyes that highlight different types and characteristics of cells.

Abnormal cells can be identified and treatment can be decided according to the results. These tests usually take at least 24 hours to process before a pathologist can examine them.

### **The diagnosis of cancer by biopsy**

Biopsies are particularly important in the diagnosis of cancer. This procedure will often be performed when there is a lump, tumour, cyst or swelling for which there is no apparent cause. In these cases, the doctor feels the only way to reach an accurate diagnosis is to take a piece of that lump and examine the cells directly.

### **Medical issues to consider**

Before the procedure, you need to discuss a range of issues with your doctor or surgeon including:

- Medical history, including any prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, herbs, vitamin or mineral supplements you may be taking. Some preparations can interact with surgical medications and need to be avoided.
- Other tests, such as blood tests or ultrasound scans, may need to be done prior to the biopsy (depending on the nature of the condition under investigation).

### **Biopsy procedure**

Biopsies are performed under local anaesthetic, with or without sedation, using scans to locate the target.

Depending upon the tissue to be biopsied, either ultrasound or computed tomography (CT) are used to guide the doctor.

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The area to be biopsied is cleaned using a cold fluid, and then a thin needle inserted through the skin into the target. Sometimes only a single biopsy is required, but often several biopsies are taken to provide more tissue for analysis.

After biopsy, a dry dressing is applied to the area. Occasionally thin paper strips (steri-strips) may be applied to the biopsy site.

### Immediately after the biopsy

How you feel after the biopsy depends on what sort of procedure was performed. Generally, you can expect after a biopsy:

- Some pain around the biopsy site. This should resolve, or at least ease over the next two or three days.
- Your doctor will suggest appropriate pain relieving medication.
- Nurses monitor your condition for some hours and check for bleeding from the biopsy site.
- You may have a blood count test to double-check that you are not bleeding internally from the biopsy site.
- You may undergo other tests to make sure all is well: for example, a chest x-ray if you had a lung biopsy.
- Surgical medications can sometimes make you drowsy, so you should not drive yourself home. Ask a friend or relative to pick you up or take a taxi.
- You will be provided with written discharge instructions and contact details.

### Possible complications from a biopsy

Depending on the biopsy procedure, possible complications include:

- Excessive bleeding (haemorrhage)
- Infection
- Damage to nearby tissue or organs
- Skin numbness around the biopsy site.

### Taking care of yourself at home

Be guided by your doctor or surgeon, but general suggestions include:

- Rest as much as you can in the next day or two.
- Limit using the body part, if this is possible. For example, if you had a biopsy performed on your arm or leg, try to rest and raise the limb for the next day or so.
- Avoid vigorous exercise and lifting heavy objects.
- You will need to keep your wound (and its dressing) dry for at least 24 hours, or longer as directed by your doctor.

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### Follow up

Results from a biopsy are usually returned with 48 - 72 hours. Some biopsies require special processing and may take longer.

Very occasionally a biopsy does not provide the diagnosis. This may be because the sample contains scar tissue or debris that does not represent the target. In this case, a repeat biopsy may be suggested.

You will need to make a follow-up appointment with your doctor to discuss the results.

Treatment depends on the diagnosis. Always see your doctor immediately if you experience any sign of infection, such as lingering pain, weeping, redness or swelling of the biopsy site.

### Other forms of diagnosis

Depending on the condition under investigation, other forms of diagnosis may include blood tests (for example, to investigate liver disease) and scans (such as a mammogram to investigate breast conditions). However, if your doctor has recommended that you undergo a biopsy, then this procedure is the best way for you to get an accurate diagnosis, and can't be substituted by any other test.

### Contact Details

Should you have any questions, please contact your doctor or LION.

In working hours (09:00-17:00) LION may be contacted via the medical secretaries:

Email: [Lion@hcahealthcare.co.uk](mailto:Lion@hcahealthcare.co.uk)

or

**Telephone: 0207 908 3756**

Out of working hours after 17:00 hrs Monday – Friday and at any time at the weekend you may contact the **LION Out of Hours Emergency Number:**

**Telephone: 0207 754 5989**

### Correspondence Address:

LION Ltd, 30 Devonshire Street, London W1G 6PU