

X-ray guided vacuum assisted breast biopsy/excision

Information for patients

This leaflet answers common questions about having an x-ray guided vacuum assisted breast biopsy or excision. If you would like further information or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to ask your nurse or doctor.

What is an x-ray guided vacuum assisted breast biopsy?

An x-ray guided vacuum assisted breast biopsy is carried out when your mammogram shows an abnormality that cannot be seen on an ultrasound scan. It involves taking small samples of breast tissue using a needle guided by special x-ray equipment. The tissue is examined in a laboratory and a diagnosis can be made.

Are you on blood-thinning medication?

Blood-thinning tablets such as warfarin, clopidogrel, apixaban or rivaroxaban can lead to extra bleeding and bruising during the breast biopsy. If you take these drugs please inform the doctor or nurse a few days in advance prior to the procedure. Contact the radiology department using the telephone numbers below.

How will this procedure be done?

You will be asked to sit on a chair or lie on your side on a reclining chair with the affected breast placed on to the mammography machine. Several x-rays will be taken. The x-ray images are used to work out the exact position for the biopsy needle so it is very important that you keep as still as possible.

Will the procedure hurt?

Before the biopsy is done, a local anaesthetic injection will be used to numb the area of the breast. This might sting for a few seconds until it takes effect. The biopsy needle is introduced through a small cut in the skin.

Several small samples of tissue will be taken using a special needle. Most patient's feedback that the procedure is a little uncomfortable but does not hurt.

Marking the site of biopsy

It is necessary to mark the biopsy site in case you should need further tests or surgery. A tiny metal marker will be inserted through the biopsy needle at the end of the procedure. The marker will cause you no problems and will be left in place if the results of the biopsy are normal. The doctor will explain about using a breast marker before the procedure begins.

Are there any side effects?

The most common side effect is some bleeding and bruising around the area. We try to reduce this by applying firm hand pressure after the biopsy before a sterile dressing is applied. More severe side effects such as an infection are extremely rare.

Aftercare

The cut made to the skin will be closed using 'Steri-Strips' and a plaster will be applied over it. The care of your breast following the procedure will be explained to you by the nurse and a 'Skin care after a vacuum assisted breast biopsy/excision' leaflet will be given to you. This is also available on our website here:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/breast-surgery

Results

You should make an appointment to return to the breast unit the following week after your procedure. You will see your consultant or a member of their team who will discuss the result.

Our contact details

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the biopsy, you can contact the radiology department (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm):

- Barnet Hospital: 020 8216 5102
- Chase Farm Hospital: 020 8375 1721
- Royal Free Hospital: 020 7794 0500 ext 35775 or 33981

Alternatively speak to a breast care nurse (Monday-Friday, 9am-4.30pm) at the location where you had your procedure:

- Barnet Hospital: 020 8216 4274
- Chase Farm Hospital: 020 8375 1620
- Royal Free Hospital: 020 7794 0500 ext 34650

More information

For more information about the breast service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/breast-surgery

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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