

Having an image (CT or ultrasound) guided abdominal or pelvic biopsy

This leaflet explains what an image guided abdominal or pelvic biopsy is, what happens during the procedure and what the possible risks are. It is not meant to replace informed discussion between you and your doctor but can act as a starting point for such a discussion.

You should have time to discuss your situation with your own consultant and the radiologist (X-ray specialist) who will be doing the biopsy, and perhaps even your own GP. You should be happy that you understand what the procedure involves as you will be required to sign a consent form prior to undergoing the biopsy.

What is an image guided abdominal or pelvic biopsy?

This is a minimally invasive way of obtaining a tiny piece of tissue using a special needle using CT or ultrasound guidance. The procedure is carried out under local anaesthetic, i.e. you are awake but the skin is numbed. You will normally go home the same day unless you do not have someone to watch over you for the 24 hours following the biopsy, in which case a one night stay in hospital may be necessary.

Why do I need a biopsy?

Your other tests, such as ultrasound and CT scans, have shown an abnormality inside your tummy. These other tests cannot tell exactly what the abnormality is or what treatment, if any, is necessary. The simplest way of finding out is by taking a tiny piece of tissue to examine in the laboratory. The alternative to an image guided biopsy is an open operation to remove the abnormal tissue, which is far more invasive.

Who has made this decision?

The consultant in charge of your care, following discussions with other specialists, considers this is the best way of diagnosing your problem.

Who will be performing the biopsy?

A radiologist who has undergone specialist training and who regularly performs this and other similar procedures will carry out the biopsy.

Where will the biopsy take place?

In the CT or ultrasound rooms in the X-ray department of the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

What happens before the biopsy?

In the weeks before your lung biopsy you will need to have blood samples taken to make sure your blood clots properly. Blood samples can either be taken in the hospital's phlebotomy (blood test) department or at your GP's surgery.

Ideally, blood-thinning medication such as Warfarin, Dabigatran, Rivaroxaban, Tinzaparin or Clopidogrel are temporarily discontinued prior to the biopsy. This is not always possible or you may be required to take additional short-acting blood thinners for a few days before. If you are taking any of these medications and have not received instructions to stop them please contact the X-ray Department on 0118 322 8368.

You will be asked not eat for 6 hours or drink for 2 hours before the biopsy.

Please take all your normal medication other than those that have been stopped for the biopsy.

What happens during the biopsy?

You will be asked to undress below the waist and put on a hospital gown. You will then be taken into the CT or ultrasound room and asked to lie on a couch. Preliminary CT or ultrasound scans will then be carried out. Once the exact needle path has been determined, the radiologist will then clean your skin with antiseptic and will inject the skin and deeper tissues with local anaesthetic. This will sting briefly before the area goes numb. The radiologist will then insert the biopsy needle and carefully advance it into position and the biopsy sample taken. Once an adequate sample has been obtained the needle will be removed. This may be done once or several times.

How long will it take?

The whole procedure takes around 20 minutes.

Will it hurt?

You will feel stinging as the local anaesthetic is injected. Some people also feel some momentary discomfort as the needle enters the abdominal cavity.

What happens afterwards?

After the biopsy, you will be monitored in the X-ray recovery area for between 2 and six hours. Assuming there are no complications, you will be discharged as long as you are accompanied home and can spend the next 24 hours with a friend or relative. If you do not have a suitable adult to accompany you home, then we can arrange for you to stay the night in hospital.

It takes a few days to analyse the sample in the laboratory. The result will be sent to the consultant in charge of your care.

What are the risks and complications?

An image guided abdominal or pelvic biopsy is generally a safe procedure but there are risks and, occasionally, complications.

There is a small risk of bleeding inside your abdomen which may require an emergency procedure and blood transfusion to treat it although this is very unlikely. There is also a small risk of injury to the bowel or other adjacent organs.

The biopsy may fail to identify the cause of your problem.

Further information

If you have any further information please call the X-ray Department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital 0118 322 8368.

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Reading RG1 5AN
0118 322 5111 (Switchboard)
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This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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