



Vacuum assisted biopsy (VAB) of the breast

This leaflet tells you what to expect during a vacuum assisted biopsy of your breast(s).

What is VAB of the breast?

A VAB is the way in which we take larger sample of breast tissue by using the vacuum-assisted method. It is very similar to the previous biopsy you have had, where we took a smaller sample of breast tissue. The VAB uses a special instrument with a vacuum and cutting method that enables more tissue to be removed.

A vacuum assisted biopsy (VAB) can be done using ultrasound or x-ray guidance. The ultrasound or mammogram machine is used to locate the area that needs to be biopsied, and visualises the biopsy needle taking the sample.

What are the benefits – why should I have this procedure?

After your previous biopsy, the breast team have decided a larger sample of breast tissue is needed to gain more information about the area in your breast tissue, in order to obtain an accurate diagnosis.

What are the risks?

The consultant radiologist or radiographer or clinical nurse specialist will discuss the benefits and risks with you prior to undertaking the procedure, but these are the main things to expect or to look out for afterwards:

- **Pain:** The local anaesthetic you received to numb the area will wear off after a couple of hours and your breast may feel sore and uncomfortable.
- **Bleeding:** A small amount of bleeding may occur at the biopsy site. We will ensure the bleeding has stopped before you leave the appointment. If bleeding occurs after you have left the hospital, apply firm pressure with a dressing or tissue over the original dressing for 10 minutes and it should stop. If the bleeding continues, please contact Carolyn Denham or Amy Chamber, Breast Screening Clinical Nurse Specialist on 0118 322 8563, your GP or NHS direct on 111 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) for advice. However, in the unlikely event that the bleeding is severe, we suggest you go to your nearest emergency department (A&E).
- **Bruising:** The amount of bruising after this procedure varies widely. Any bruising around the biopsy area should take one or two weeks to clear up. Bruising inside the breast can make your breast feel lumpy or it may make an existing lump feel bigger than it did before. This is normal after this procedure and will settle as the bruise settles.
- **Infection:** An infection at the biopsy site is rare but a possibility. Please follow the aftercare instructions to reduce the risk. If there are any sign of an infection: high temperature, pus, reddening skin, swollen or hot to touch, please contact Carolyn Denham or Amy Chamber,

Breast Screening Clinical Nurse Specialist on 0118 322 8563 or your GP or NHS on 111 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) for advice.

- **Repeat biopsy:** In some cases, a biopsy may need to be repeated if the sample that is taken is inadequate. If this is the case, a nurse or doctor will discuss this with you.
- **Pneumothorax:** A pneumothorax (punctured lung) is an extremely rare complication of an ultrasound/mammogram guided vacuum-assisted biopsy. Using ultrasound/mammogram during the biopsy to guide the needle to the abnormality means that the needle can be seen throughout the procedure, minimising the risk that the lung will be punctured.

How can I prepare for the procedure?

- Please eat and drink normally before the procedure.
- If you are on any blood thinning medication, please contact the Carolyn Denham or Amy Chamber, Breast Screening Clinical Nurse Specialist on 0118 322 8563 or 0118 322 8282 to leave a message for the admin team before your appointment.
- If you are allergic to any medication, particularly local anaesthetic, or any metal or nickel, please contact us as above.
- Please tell us if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant.

On the day of your appointment, please do not wear deodorant, powder, lotion or perfume on your breasts and your underarm areas, as these products may show up on the mammogram films.

What happens during the procedure?

- We must seek your consent for any procedure or treatment beforehand. The consultant radiologist or radiographer undertaking the procedure or our clinical nurse specialist will explain the risks, benefits and alternatives, where relevant, before they ask for your consent. If you are unsure about any aspect of the proposed procedure or treatment, please do not hesitate to ask for more information.
- The procedure takes place in the mammography/ultrasound room and you will be asked to remove the clothing from the top half of your body, including your bra. Because of this, it is easier to wear a skirt or trousers instead of a dress for your appointment.
- You will be asked to lie down or sit up on the couch. For the ultrasound guided procedure, the specialist will put some gel onto your skin and will use the ultrasound probe to find the abnormality to be biopsied. For the mammogram guided procedure, your breast will be compressed throughout the examination and low-dose X-rays are used.
- A local anaesthetic injection with adrenaline will be given to numb the area to be biopsied. This works very quickly. You can expect to feel some sensations during the biopsy but this should be pull/pushing/vibration sensations and not a sharp pain. The specialist will ensure that the area is numb before proceeding.
- A small cut is made in the skin and then the specialist will use the ultrasound/mammogram to guide the needle that takes the sample of abnormal tissue. The needle stays in the breast during the sampling and you will hear some noises but most patients report that this does not cause them any particular discomfort.
- The specialist may stop once or twice to x-ray the sample during the procedure. When the biopsy is finished, a marker clip is inserted. You will not feel this.

The sample will then be sent to the pathology lab for testing.

- You can choose to stop the procedure at any point during the procedure, including after you have signed the consent form, but this may mean we do not have enough tissue for a diagnosis.

What happens after the procedure?

Immediately after the procedure, we will apply firm pressure to the breast for 10 minutes. This will help to minimise the risk of developing internal bruising in the breast (haematoma). A paper stitch (steri-strip) and a sterile dressing will be placed over the small cut. A mammogram will then be performed to check the position of the marker clip. On some occasions, a pressure bandage will also be applied.

Once you are dressed, you are asked to stay for about 30 minutes until we are sure that you feel comfortable enough to leave the department.

Due to the adrenaline in the local anaesthetic injection, **we recommend that you do not drive for the rest of the day, and that you have a friend or relative to accompany you home.** If possible, please arrange time off work on the day of the procedure.

How long will I be at the hospital for?

You will be in our department for 1-2 hours. When you arrive, we will need to go through the consent form with you. The equipment also needs to be set up. You may be here for 30-45 minutes before the procedure starts. The biopsy itself only takes a short time, but the positioning and putting pressure on afterwards takes time.

Results

Once the vacuum-assisted biopsy has been done, we will let the breast team know. Once the results have been processed by the Pathology Department, the breast team will ring you to organise an appointment to discuss the results.

Are there any alternatives to having a VAB?

The usual alternative is a surgical biopsy procedure, which requires a general anaesthetic. Occasionally, if the vacuum biopsy is not possible for technical reasons, you may require a surgical biopsy but this will be discussed with you.

Aftercare instructions

The dressing

The dressing applied should be left on for 48 hours and kept clean and dry. You should remove it after 48 hours. If the dressing causes any skin irritation, please remove it immediately and replace it with another suitable dressing, e.g. large plaster.

Pain relief

Most women feel some discomfort and experience bruising to the breast following the procedure. If your breasts feel tender following the procedure, please take over the counter painkillers, such as paracetamol, following the dosage instructions on the packet. Avoid products containing aspirin.

Exercise

It is recommended to rest on the day of the biopsy and avoid any heavy lifting or other heavy jobs. Also avoid swimming or sport for the 48 hours after the biopsy.

Bra

Underwired bras can be worn as normal following the biopsy procedure to provide support to the breast. Or, you may find it more comfortable to wear a soft non-wired bra or sports bra.

More information

If you have any concerns or worries related to this procedure, please contact Carolyn Denham or Amy Chambers, Breast Screening Clinical Nurse Specialist on 0118 322 8563 or email westberksbsu@nhs.net. Out of normal working hours, please contact your GP or NHS direct on 111.

For more information about breast screening visit <https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/services-and-departments/radiology/breast-screening>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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Reviewed: March 2026. Next review due: March 2028.