

Stereotactic vacuum assisted biopsy (VAB) of the breast

What is stereotactic VAB of the breast?

A stereotactic VAB uses mammogram equipment to help locate an area of concern in the breast. As the result of your previous biopsy was not satisfactory a VAB biopsy is taken to obtain tissue samples from the breast for further investigation in the laboratory.

Also VAB can be used in some areas that may be difficult to diagnose and where a biopsy would otherwise be removed under a general anaesthetic.

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

We have previously biopsied this abnormal area but need a bigger sample in order to obtain a definitive result.

The risks and recovery from a general anaesthetic will be avoided as VAB only requires a local anaesthetic.

What are the risks?

Please note complications from this procedure are rare. However, the risks include:

- Internal bruising (haematoma) in the breast following the procedure. We try and minimise internal bruising by placing firm pressure on the breast immediately after the biopsy.
- Bleeding from the wound site. Rarely, the biopsy site can start to bleed after you have left the unit. We will give you instructions on what to do if this happens later in this leaflet.
- Infection of the wound site. The wound will be covered with a sterile dressing after the procedure and we will advise you how to look after the area to minimise the risk of infection.

How can I prepare for the procedure?

- You can eat and drink normally before and after the procedure.
- Medication – Please let us know if you are taking any antiplatelet medicines (for example, Aspirin, Clopidogrel) or any medicines that thin your blood (for example, Warfarin) as we may need to perform an INR test beforehand (this determines how long it takes your blood to clot).
- Please tell us all medications that you are taking.
- Please tell us if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant.
- If you are allergic to any medication, particularly local anaesthetic, please contact us as soon as possible for further information.

- On the day of your appointment please do not wear deodorant, powder, lotion or perfume on your breasts and your under arm areas, as these products may show up on the mammogram films.
- Relatives and escorts – If possible please bring a friend or relative to accompany you home; please note, they will not be allowed into the examination room.
- Driving – We recommend that you do not drive for the rest of the day. We also recommend that you do not use public transport after your procedure.
- If possible, please arrange time off work on the day of the procedure.
- You will be in our department for approximately two hours.

What happens during the procedure?

- The procedure takes place in the mammography room and you will be awake for the entire test, which normally lasts approximately 45 minutes. The procedure will be performed by a specially trained radiologist/advanced practitioner.
- You will be asked to undress to the waist. A radiographer will position you in the mammogram machine, either sitting or lying down on a couch depending on the location of the area of abnormality in the breast.
- Mammogram images will be taken to check the correct area has been located and local anaesthetic will then be used to numb the specific part of the breast.
- Once the area is numb a needle will be advanced into the breast and several tissue samples will be taken using a vacuum biopsy system. A needle will make a small cut in the skin and in most cases is inserted only once into the breast. A vacuum is then used to remove the breast tissue sample.
- The needle we use to take the biopsy tissue makes a small noise but most patients report that this does not cause them any particular discomfort.
- If your biopsy is to investigate calcification in the breast, we shall also take an X-ray of the removed specimen to check we have correctly sampled the tissue with the calcified deposits.

Will I feel any pain?

The local anaesthetic may cause stinging before it numbs the breast but this should only last for a few seconds. You may feel some pressure on the breast during the procedure but should not feel any pain. If you do feel pain tell the radiologist/radiographer and more local anaesthetic will be introduced to the breast.

What happens after the procedure?

Immediately after the procedure, we will apply firm pressure to the breast for 15 minutes. This will help to minimise the risk of developing internal bruising in the breast (haematoma). A paper stitch (steristrip) and a sterile dressing will be placed over the small cut in the skin and on some occasions a pressure bandage will also be applied. Once you are dressed we will move you to another area within the department where you will stay for about 30 minutes until we are sure you feel comfortable enough to leave the department.

What do I need to do after I go home?

We recommend that for the rest of the day you take it easy and rest as much as possible. For two days following the procedure, strenuous activities such as heavy lifting, running or going to the gym should be avoided but normal day to day activities can be resumed. If your work is physical then we advise you to carry out light duties the following day. The anaesthetic will wear off after two to three hours. If you then find your breast uncomfortable or painful, take a mild painkiller such as paracetamol or Ibuprofen. Avoid taking aspirin as this may cause extra bruising to develop in the breast.

You will be left with a tiny scar on the skin at the site of the biopsy. Rarely, the biopsy site can start to bleed after you have gone home. If this happens, apply pressure to the breast over the biopsy site for 15 minutes in the same way as was done after the biopsy. If the bleeding continues after this, please continue to apply pressure to the area and contact your GP or local hospital emergency department.

When will I receive my results?

The results will not be known immediately after the procedure. The tissue samples collected will be sent to the lab for analysis. We will make you an appointment to discuss your results in a week to 10 days.

Will I have to give consent?

It is important that you understand what will happen during the procedure and how it might help you. You have the right to change your mind at any time before the procedure is undertaken, including after you have signed the form. The choice is yours, but we only recommend that you have a breast biopsy when it is essential to confirm the diagnosis of the problem.

If there are any problems or queries please contact Carolyn Denham, Breast Screening Clinical Nurse Specialist on 0118 322 8563.

More information

If you have any concerns or worries related to this procedure, please contact Carolyn Denham on 0118 322 8563. Out of normal working hours please contact your GP.

For more information about breast screening visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/wards-and-services/breast-screening.htm

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

C Denham, June 2019
Review due: June 2021