

Dental biopsy procedures

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having a biopsy in the oral medicine department. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a biopsy?

A biopsy is often recommended following a consultation in a clinic. It involves taking a small sample of tissue from your mouth, for example from your tongue or inside your cheek. This sample is then sent to the pathology laboratory where they will examine it under a microscope to try to identify what is causing the lesion (abnormal area inside your mouth).

What are the benefits – why should I have a biopsy?

It is a simple procedure that helps with the diagnoses of a lesion.

What are the risks?

The risks are very small but having a biopsy may produce some pain, bleeding, discomfort and swelling. In a small number of cases there is a risk that tiny nerves may be damaged in the area where the biopsy is being taken, but this will be explained to you when you attend your consultation appointment.

Are there any other alternatives?

There are no alternatives to a biopsy that can be used to diagnose and confirm the cause of a lesion. If you choose not to have a biopsy, this will be fully discussed with you and your treatment plan will be adjusted accordingly.

How can I prepare for a biopsy?

No special precautions have to be taken before your appointment. Please take all medication as normal but ensure that the doctor treating you is aware of them.

If you are taking warfarin please tell the doctor at the time of your consultation. You will need to have a blood test, to check your Warfarin levels, between 24 and 72 hours before having the biopsy. You will not need to stop taking your Warfarin tablets but the doctor will need to see the blood test result before going ahead with the biopsy.

Please eat and drink as normal prior to your appointment and do not miss meals.

Please make sure you arrive on time for your appointment.

Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves.

If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you.

What happens during the biopsy?

The biopsy takes place under local anaesthetic, which means you will be awake and have an injection to numb the tissue in the area where the biopsy will be taken. A small piece of tissue will be removed and often dissolvable stitches will be used in order to help with the healing.

The whole procedure normally takes approximately 30 minutes.

Will I feel any pain?

You may feel a little discomfort when the local anaesthetic is being given to numb the area. The clinician will check that the area is numb before going ahead with the biopsy.

What happens after the biopsy?

Following the biopsy, the doctor will instruct you on how to keep your mouth comfortable over the next few days.

The area may be sore and any discomfort can be controlled with over the counter painkillers. You should receive the leaflet, **Going home after your dental surgery**, which gives you more information. If you do not, please ask us for one.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You will be able to eat and drink as normal immediately after the biopsy but we recommend that you:

- avoid anything too hot for the first 24 hours and allow meals and drinks to cool to room temperature
- do not rinse and spit out for this period
- there may be an unpleasant taste in your mouth but this can be resolved with sips of drinks
- please do not plan anything very physically exerting for the rest of the day either at work or for leisure
- use warm, salty mouthwashes after every meal for the following 5 – 7 days starting 24 hours after the biopsy.

The stitches are dissolvable and do not need to be removed. They normally take 10 – 15 days to dissolve.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You maybe asked to make a follow up appointment with the oral medicine clinic where we will be able to give you the results of your biopsy. If you need further treatment, we will also discuss this with you at the follow-up appointment. Sometimes we can give you the result of your biopsy over the telephone which means that you will not have to come back for another appointment if no further treatment is needed.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about having a biopsy, please contact the **oral medicine department** on 020 7188 4395, Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm.

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership