

# Having a skin biopsy

This leaflet explains what a skin biopsy is and the benefits, risks and alternatives of this procedure. If you have any questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## What is a skin biopsy and why do I need it?

A skin biopsy is a routine investigation that helps us to diagnose skin conditions. It can also be used as a treatment to remove some abnormalities, such as moles. A biopsy is where a small sample of skin is removed under local anaesthetic in order for it to be looked at under the microscope. Local anaesthetic is a medication that numbs the specific area of the body so it is pain free, but does not put you to sleep.

There are no alternatives to this procedure; it is the only way to get the information needed to make a correct diagnosis.

## Before your biopsy

Please let the staff looking after you know if you are taking any antiplatelet medicines (such as aspirin or clopidogrel) or any anticoagulant medicines (such as warfarin or rivaroxaban) as they may increase the risk of bleeding during and after the procedure. The doctor at your consultation will advise you if you need to stop any of your medicines before your biopsy.

If you are taking warfarin, please visit your local warfarin clinic two to three days before your surgery date and have your INR checked. If it is below 2 or above 3.5, please contact the dermatology clinic, as your biopsy date may need to be rearranged. The contact number is in the **Contact us** section on page 3.

Please let us know if you have any allergies to medications including local anaesthetic, or if you are planning to travel within two weeks after your biopsy, as this will affect arrangements for removing your stitches (if you have them).

Because some people feel light-headed after their biopsy, **you should not drive to your appointment** and should have someone to help you home.

You can eat, drink as normal before 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.

You should receive the leaflet, **Helping you decide: our consent policy**, which gives you more information. If you do not, please ask a member of staff caring for you for a copy.

## What happens during my skin biopsy?

The biopsy will be performed either by a doctor or a specialist nurse. We will give an injection of local anaesthetic to the area where the biopsy will be taken. This may sting for a few seconds, but then the area will feel numb. You may feel pulling or pressure on the area when we take the biopsy, but it should not be painful. We will take a sample of tissue by cutting or scraping your skin. We may have to take more than one biopsy, depending on your circumstances. If we close your wound(s) with stitches, you will need to have these removed at your GP surgery.

The whole procedure is usually completed within 30 minutes.

## What happens after the procedure?

A nurse will dress your wound and explain how to look after it at home.

**Please make sure you receive a separate aftercare information sheet before you leave hospital.** If you have stitches, your nurse will also discuss arrangements for their removal and will give you a letter to give to the nurse at your GP practice. You will be able to leave hospital as soon as you feel well enough, and can eat and drink as soon as you wish.

## Will I have any pain or discomfort?

The local anaesthetic will begin to wear off about 30 to 40 minutes after the operation. If you experience any discomfort from your wound, you can take simple painkillers such as paracetamol to help with this. **Always follow the instructions on the packet and never take more than the recommended dose.**

Check that the painkillers will not react with any other medicines you are taking. If you are unsure or if you have allergies to any medicines, speak to your pharmacist.

## What are the risks?

We will discuss the risks with you in detail before we ask you to sign the consent form. Short-term risks include infection, bleeding and swelling of your wound. Although the biopsies taken are not large, you will have a small scar in the long term.

## Will I have a follow-up appointment?

We will arrange a follow-up appointment, where the results of your biopsy will be discussed with you.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your biopsy, please contact **Guy's Dermatology Outpatient Department** on **020 7188 7188 ext 86418** (9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday). **This is not an emergency service.**

**Dermatological Surgery and Laser Unit (DSLU) St Thomas' hospital** offers an answerphone service on **020 17188 6284** between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Please leave a message with your name and telephone number and someone will get back to you as soon as possible. **This is not an emergency service.**

**In an emergency, please contact your GP or go to your local A&E Department.**

### 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

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**e:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas'    **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's    **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@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 using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815    **fax:** 020 7188 5953

### 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](http://www.nhs.uk)

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