

Having a fine needle aspiration of the breast (FNA)

This leaflet explains more about having a fine needle aspiration of the breast, including the benefits, risks and any alternatives. It also provides information on what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a radiographer in the breast imaging unit or to one of the breast care nurses. Contact numbers are at the end of this leaflet.

What is a fine needle aspiration of the breast (FNA)?

A fine needle aspiration of the breast is a way of taking fluid, and/or a few cells, from the breast so that they can be examined under a microscope. It is not the same as a biopsy as no intact tissue is removed. Fine needle aspiration is often abbreviated to FNA.

The procedure is performed by radiologists and radiographers that are specially trained to perform these tests.

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

If changes in your breasts are detected by either a mammogram or ultrasound scan, the breast consultant will require a cell sample (FNA) or tissue sample (biopsy) to identify what is causing the changes. These cell and tissue samples can be analysed under a microscope and the results can help to confirm the diagnosis.

What are the risks?

Occasionally, there may be some bleeding inside the breast and a bruise or swelling (haematoma) will form. Care is taken during the procedure to minimise the risk of infection. Care is also taken that the needle does not pass beyond the breast through the chest wall. This is especially important if a lump is situated at the back of a small breast.

Are there any alternatives?

You may be offered an alternative test called a diagnostic excision biopsy. Excision biopsy, performed in the operating theatre under general anaesthetic, is surgery to remove the area of abnormality from the breast. In addition to removing the abnormality, the surgeon will remove a small rim of normal tissue around it as well, called a margin. This procedure will leave a scar and recovery time is longer.

How can I prepare for an FNA?

There are no special preparations beforehand for this procedure. You can eat and drink normally before and after. However:

- Please let us know if you are taking any antiplatelet medicines (such as aspirin or clopidogrel) or any medicines that thin the blood (warfarin, for example), as these may need to be withheld temporarily before the procedure. Please let the radiologist know before the procedure starts or call the breast care nurses on **020 7188 0869** for advice as soon as you get your appointment letter.
- Please let the doctor know about all of the medicines you are taking, including anything that you buy yourself over the counter, or any herbal or homeopathic medicines.
- If you are allergic to any medication (particularly local anaesthetic) please contact us as soon as possible after receiving your appointment.
- On the day of your appointment do not wear deodorant, powder, lotion or perfume on your breasts and underarm areas, as these can affect the accuracy of your ultrasound examination.
- Try to bring a friend or relative to accompany you home. This may also be useful if you do not understand English very well or if you have any special needs. Although your friend or relative may not be allowed into the examination room, they can be a valuable source of support for you on the day. If you require an interpreter to attend your appointment please contact the Language and accessible support services on **020 7188 8815**.
- Please be aware that we are unable to offer childcare facilities. If you need to bring your children with you, please bring along an adult who can supervise them whilst your examination is being carried out.

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 procedure?

The procedure should last no longer than 15 minutes and is carried out in an ultrasound room. You will be asked to remove all of your clothes from the waist up and to lie on the examination couch.

An ultrasound scan of the breast will be performed first to locate the area that needs to be sampled. The radiologist or sonographer will then clean the area of your breast that he or she is going to examine. A local anaesthetic may then be used to numb the skin.

Once the area is numb, a fine needle is introduced into the area of concern. Using a syringe on the end of the needle, suction is applied to draw up fluid and cells from the breast and the needle may be moved up and down through the breast tissue whilst this is happening. The position of the needle is monitored throughout the examination using the ultrasound machine. The needle is then removed and the fluid and cells are placed in a special bottle or onto a microscope slide. The procedure may then be repeated once or twice more.

Once an adequate sample is obtained, a small plaster will be placed over the needle puncture site and you will be able to get dressed.

Will I feel any pain?

During the procedure the local anaesthetic may cause some 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 you should not feel any pain. If you do feel pain, tell the radiologist or sonographer and more local anaesthetic will be introduced to the breast.

Once the local anaesthetic wears off after two to three hours your breast may be tender or painful. If the area becomes particularly uncomfortable take a mild over the counter painkiller, such as paracetamol, following the instructions on the pack. Avoid taking a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) such as ibuprofen or medicines that contain aspirin, as these could cause bruising in the breast.

What happens after the procedure?

The samples will be sent to the laboratory to be analysed. Your results are usually back within one week.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You can return to normal activity straight away but you should avoid any strenuous exertion, such as heavy lifting, jogging, and aerobics for the rest of the day. If your work is physical we advise light duties only for the rest of the day, then back to normal duties the following day.

If you take any **antiplatelet medicines** (for example, aspirin, clopidogrel) **or any medicines that thin the blood** (for example, warfarin or rivaroxaban) you may need to stop taking them for a short time after the procedure. The radiologist/radiographer will discuss this with you before you go home. If you have any further questions about your medication after your procedure, call the breast care nurses on **020 7188 0869**.

Take any other normal medication as prescribed unless you have been advised otherwise. The plaster can be removed from the breast two hours after the procedure and no further dressings are required on the puncture site. You can shower and bathe as normal.

What should I do if I have a problem?

You may notice some bruising at the puncture site. This is to be expected after a fine needle aspiration (FNA) and will usually subside within two weeks.

Bleeding or swelling is rare but if it does happen please follow these instructions:

- Remove the plaster from the puncture site and apply pressure.
- Do this firmly by pressing with the palm of your hand for 10 minutes using either tissues or a paper kitchen towel in the same way the nurse pressed immediately after the biopsy.
- If the bleeding or swelling continues **after 15 minutes you should go to your local emergency department (A&E) /minor injuries unit, taking this sheet with you.**

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

If you have come for your fine needle aspiration via an appointment at the Breast Unit One Stop Clinic, you will either receive your results in a letter by post or you will be asked to return to the Breast Unit once all your tests have been completed. Here, the breast consultant will discuss when you should expect to receive your results.

If you have come for an outpatient appointment you will receive the results from your consultant at your next appointment. Please make sure that an appointment is arranged for you to come in and discuss the results.

Contact us

If you have any questions before your appointment, please contact the breast radiology department on **020 7188 5574** or the breast care nurses on **020 7188 0869** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

If you have any questions/problems after your appointment, please contact breast radiology on **020 7188 5574** or the Breast Unit One Stop Clinic on **020 7188 1483** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

If you have a significant medical problem out of hours, contact your GP in the first instance. If it is an emergency, call 999 for an ambulance.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

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 and accessible 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

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