

Stereotactic vacuum assisted mammotome (VAM) biopsy of the breast

This leaflet explains more about having a stereotactic vacuum assisted mammotome (VAM) biopsy 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 a breast care nurse. Contact numbers are included at end of this leaflet.

What is a stereotactic VAM biopsy of the breast?

It is a procedure where mammogram equipment is used to help locate an area of interest in the breast, and a biopsy (tissue sample) is taken from the breast.

Why should I have this procedure?

Your recent mammogram has shown an area of abnormality in the breast that needs to be investigated. This procedure will help to make a diagnosis.

What are the risks?

Complications from VAM biopsy are rare. However, as with any procedure there are some risks associated with it. They include:

1. Internal bruising (haematoma) in the breast following the procedure. We try to minimise internal bruising by placing firm pressure on the breast immediately after the biopsy.
2. 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.
3. Infection of the wound site. The wound will be covered with a sterile dressing after the procedure and we will advise how to look after the area.
4. There is also a small risk that the area of abnormality is in a part of the breast which proves difficult to obtain good tissue samples. This may lead to an inconclusive biopsy result and your doctor may advise an alternative investigation, such as a diagnostic excision biopsy described in the next section 'Are there any alternatives?'

Are there any alternatives?

An alternative to VAM biopsy is 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 also removes a small rim of normal tissue around it called a margin. Excision biopsy leaves a scar and requires more time to recover.

How can I prepare for a stereotactic VAM biopsy?

- You can eat and drink normally before and after the procedure.
- **Medicines. Please tell your doctor about all medicines that you are taking.** If you are taking any **antiplatelet medicines** (for example aspirin or clopidogrel) or any anticoagulant **medicines** (for example warfarin or rivaroxaban), call the breast care nurses on **020 7188 0869** for advice as soon as you get your appointment letter as these may need to be stopped temporarily before the procedure.
- **If you are allergic to any medicines but particularly to local anaesthetic, please contact us as soon as possible after receiving your appointment letter.**
- Please tell us if there is any possibility that you are pregnant.
- On the day of your appointment, **please do not wear deodorant, powder, lotion or perfume** on your breasts and underarm 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. This may also be useful if you do not understand English very well or if you have any special needs. However, please note that they will not be allowed into the examination room. If you require an interpreter to attend your appointment, please contact the Language Support Service (contact numbers are at the end of this leaflet).
- **Children.** 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 while your examination is being carried out.
- **Driving.** We recommend that you do not drive for the rest of the day.
- **Bra.** Some women find it more comfortable to wear a bra following the procedure. If you don't normally wear a bra, please bring a soft, non-wired bra (such as a sports bra) with you to wear after the procedure, and for the following few days.

If possible, please arrange time off work on the day of the procedure. Please expect to be in our department for about two hours.

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 takes place in the mammography room and you will be awake for the entire test, which normally lasts about one hour. It will be performed by a specially trained radiologist or radiographer.
- You will be asked to undress to the waist and put on a hospital gown. A radiographer will position you in the mammogram machine either sitting or lying down on a couch, depending on where the area of abnormality is in the breast.
- Mammogram images will be taken to check that 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 inserted into the breast and tissue samples will be taken using a vacuum biopsy system. The needle will make a small cut in the skin and in most cases it is inserted only once into the breast.
- Once all the samples have been taken, a tiny metal marker clip will be introduced into the breast through the biopsy needle to mark the area where the samples were taken from. This should be a painless procedure. The marker is harmless (it will stay in the breast and cause no discomfort) and is necessary because it marks the area of concern and can be easily seen on mammogram films. The marker clip will not be picked up on airport security detectors.

Will I feel any pain?

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 used.

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. You will need to keep this dressing on for three days. On the fourth day you should remove the dressing and steristrips. On some occasions, a pressure bandage will also be applied. Once you are dressed, we will ask you to stay in the department for about 30 minutes to make sure that you feel comfortable enough to go home. We can make you a hot drink so please ask us if you would like one.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You should take it easy and rest as much as possible for the remaining part of the day. Please avoid any strenuous activities, such as heavy lifting, jogging or going to the gym for the following two days but you can start your usual day-to-day activities. If your work is physical, we advise that you to carry out light duties the following day.

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.

Pain and discomfort usually subsides after one week. If you are experiencing pain for longer than one week or are concerned, please contact a breast care nurse on the number at the end of this leaflet. You will be left with a permanent tiny scar on the skin (about the size of a freckle) 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 the nurse pressed immediately after the biopsy. **If the bleeding continues after this time, please continue to apply pressure to the area and contact us on one of the numbers at the end of this leaflet, or go to your local emergency department (A&E).**

Detailed aftercare advice is included in our leaflet, **Going home after your vacuum biopsy**. Please ask us for a copy if you have not received one before you go home after your procedure.

When will I receive my results?

The results will not be given to you immediately after the procedure. The tissue samples will be sent to the lab for analysis – this takes about one week. You will be contacted by the Breast Clinic when the results are ready. If you have not heard from the Breast Clinic two weeks after the procedure, please contact them on **020 7188 1483**.

Contact us

If you have any questions **before your appointment**, please contact:

Breast radiology **020 7188 5574**

Breast care nurses **020 7188 0869**

(Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

If you have any questions or concerns **after your appointment**, please contact:

Breast radiology **020 7188 5574**

Breast clinic **020 7188 1483**

(Monday to Friday, 9am – 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

Leaflet number: 3040/VER3

Date published: August 2017

Review date: August 2020

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