

Genital skin biopsies

This leaflet explains more about genital skin biopsies, including the benefits, risks, any alternatives and 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?

It is a procedure by which a small sample of skin is removed.

Why should I have a biopsy?

This procedure allows us to examine the skin sample under a microscope (histological examination). Looking at the pattern of cells we can establish or confirm a diagnosis. This helps us to plan the best treatment for you.

What are the risks?

It is rare for any complications to occur after biopsy. Very occasionally an infection may develop despite you doing all the right things. This will slow down the healing process and may make the site sore for a few days, but usually there are no long-term side effects and it can be treated with antibiotics.

Sometimes it is not possible to make a diagnosis from the biopsy sample.

Are there any alternatives?

There are usually no alternatives to establish a definite diagnosis. Without a biopsy your treatment will need to be based on clinical findings alone which are not always clear. Sometimes this will mean it takes longer to find the correct treatment for your condition.

How can I prepare for a biopsy?

You may be given a local anaesthetic cream to use before your biopsy. If you are, apply this to the affected area as directed by your doctor, an hour before you are due to be seen 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.

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 a biopsy?

The doctor will decide the best place for a biopsy. It is usually the part of the skin most affected by the skin condition. The area will first be numbed with local anaesthetic which is injected using a small needle. It will sting at first but the area will very quickly become numb so you will not feel any pain.

After the skin sample has been taken, the biopsy site may be treated with a chemical stick (silver nitrate) to stop bleeding. This will leave a small black spot which will disappear when the skin heals, usually over the next seven days. Occasionally, a small stitch may be necessary but this will not cause any further pain because of the local anaesthetic.

The appointment should take about 30 minutes.

Will I feel any pain?

You may feel pulling or pressure on the area of the biopsy but you should not feel any pain during the procedure.

If the area feels tender after the procedure, you may wish to take your usual painkillers for the first night.

What happens after a biopsy?

You can go home immediately after the biopsy. Please remember that it is normal for the area to be red and tender for the first few days.

The results can take up to three weeks to be available.

What do I need to do after I go home?

It is important to keep the biopsy site clean and dry. We recommend that you do not wash the area for about 12 hours after the procedure.

After a shower or bath, you should only gently pat the skin dry. Do not rub the area as the friction will slow the healing of the biopsy site. Some spotting of blood may occur for about two to three days after the biopsy.

You should refrain from sexual intercourse until the area is healed and comfortable.

If you have had a stitch, this will gradually dissolve over the next one to two weeks as the wound heals.

What should I do if I have a problem?

If you experience any signs of infection around the biopsy site (such as increased pain, redness, heat or swelling), or feel that the bleeding is excessive, please contact the Lloyd Clinic (contact details below) or go to your nearest A&E department.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Most people will come back for a follow-up appointment to get their results. This will be arranged for you in clinic following your biopsy.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your biopsy, please contact a member of the nursing staff at the Lloyd Clinic on 020 7188 2656 (Monday to Friday, 8.30 am to 6pm).

Useful sources of information

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:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' t: 020 7188 8803 at Guy's e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)

For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital. t: 020 7188 3416

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