

# 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, lip, gum or inside of 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 diagnosis 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 alternatives?

There are no alternatives that can be used to diagnose and confirm the cause of a lesion.

## How can I prepare for a biopsy?

No special precautions have to be taken before your appointment. Please eat and drink as normal prior to your appointment and do not miss meals.

Please take all medications as normal but ensure that the doctor treating you is aware of them, especially blood thinning medication.

### Blood thinning medication

- Aspirin and clopidogrel: please take as normal.
- Apixaban, rivaroxaban, dabigatran: please take as normal.
- Warfarin: do not stop taking warfarin, but please have a blood test to check your INR at your usual clinic 24-48 hours before your biopsy, and bring the result with you. Alternatively you may be asked to come early for your biopsy and a blood test will be carried out at the hospital on the same day.

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 a biopsy?

The biopsy will take place under a local anaesthetic, which means you will be awake during the procedure and will have an injection to numb the tissue in the area where the biopsy will be taken. The whole procedure normally takes approximately 30 minutes.

A small piece of tissue will be removed from your mouth. Often dissolvable stitches will be used in order to help with the healing. The exact procedure will depend on what type of biopsy you are having.

A biopsy of a lesion on the tongue, lip, inside the cheek or floor of the mouth normally requires one to three dissolvable stitches, depending on the size of the lesion. If the biopsy is on the roof of the mouth or gum, it is not usually possible to stitch the area. A chemical may be used to help stop bleeding (silver nitrate). This can leave a grey stain and bitter taste for several days.

## 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?

Before leaving the clinic, your doctor will check that any bleeding has stopped, and will then instruct you on how to keep your mouth comfortable over the next few days.

The area may be sore. 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 have a copy, please ask us for one.

## What do I need to do after I go home?

You will need to be careful with eating and we recommend a soft diet. Immediately after the biopsy you should follow these instructions.

- Avoid very hot food or drinks for the first 24 hours. The area will be numb and you need to protect the area of surgery.
- Do not rinse and spit out as this can dislodge clots and cause bleeding.
- There may be an unpleasant taste in your mouth but this can be resolved with small sips of water.
- Do not plan anything physically tiring for the rest of the day.
- Starting 24 hours after the biopsy, use warm, salty mouthwash (a teaspoon of salt in a large glass of warm water) after every meal for the following five to seven days.

Stitches usually partially dissolve and then fall out and do not need to be removed. They normally take 10-15 days to dissolve. Stitches in your tongue or lip are easily dislodged so avoid crunchy food and keep speaking to a minimum for 24 hours.

## Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will be asked to make a follow-up appointment in the oral medicine clinic to receive the results of your biopsy. If you need further treatment, this will also be explained at the follow-up appointment. Occasionally, when a simple lump is removed and no further treatment is required, we can give you the results in a telephone consultation appointment.

### Contact us

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

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://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, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

### 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](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)  
**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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      **w:** [111.nhs.uk](http://111.nhs.uk)

### NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets), or **e:** [patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk)

**Leaflet number: 1802/VER3**

Date published: April 2019

Review date: April 2022

© 2019 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust  
A list of sources is available on request