Stereotactic vacuum assisted mammotome (VAM) biopsy of the breast

This leaflet explains more about having a stereotactic VAM biopsy of the breast, including the benefits, risks and any alternatives. It also gives information on what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any questions, please speak to a radiographer in the breast imaging unit or a breast care nurse (details 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 you 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:

- internal bruising (haematoma) in the breast after the procedure. We try to minimise this by placing firm pressure on the breast immediately after the biopsy.
- 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.
- infection of the wound site. The wound will be covered with a sterile dressing after the procedure and we will tell you how to look after the area.
- a small risk that the area of abnormality is in a part of the breast which is difficult to get good tissue samples from. This may lead to an inconclusive biopsy result and your doctor might advise a different investigation, such as a diagnostic excision biopsy described in the next section.

Are there any other options?
An alternative to a VAM biopsy is a diagnostic excision biopsy. This is done in the operating theatre under general anaesthetic. It is surgery to remove the area of abnormality from the breast. As well as removing the abnormality, the surgeon will remove a small rim of normal tissue around it, called a margin. This procedure will leave a scar and the recovery time is longer.
How you can 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, t: 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 or 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 need an interpreter to come to your appointment, please contact the language support service (details at the end of this leaflet).
- **Children.** We cannot offer childcare facilities. If you need to bring your children with you, please bring 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 after 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 next few days.

If possible, please arrange time off work on the day of the procedure. Please expect to be in our department for about 2 hours.

**Consent – asking for your consent**

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.

**During the procedure**

- The procedure takes place in the mammography room and you will be awake for the whole test, which normally lasts about 1 hour. It will be done by a radiologist or radiographer.
- You will be asked to undress from the waist up, 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 that 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 you feel any pain?**
The 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.

**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 (haematoma) in the breast. A paper stitch (Steri-Strip) and a sterile dressing will be placed over the small cut in the skin. You will need to keep this dressing on for 3 days. On the 4th day you should remove the dressing and Steri-Strips. Sometimes, 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 you need to do after you 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 next 2 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 next day.

Once the local anaesthetic wears off, after 2-3 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 subside after 1 week. If you have pain for longer than 1 week or are concerned, please contact a breast care nurse (details 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, 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 nearest Emergency Department (A&E).

Detailed aftercare advice is 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 you receive your 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 1 week. You will be contacted by the Breast Clinic when the results are ready. If you have not heard from the Breast Clinic 2 weeks after the procedure, please contact the Breast Clinic Secretary, t: 020 7188 1469.

Contact us
If you have any questions before your appointment, please contact the breast imaging coordinator, t: 020 7188 8317, or the breast care nurses, t: 020 7188 0869, Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm.

If you have any questions or concerns after your appointment, please contact the breast imaging coordinator, t: 020 7188 8317, or breast clinic, t: 020 7188 1483, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

If you have a significant medical problem out of hours, contact your GP. 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, w: 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
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
This service 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: www.111.nhs.uk

NHS website
This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. w: www.nhs.uk