



PATIENT INFORMATION

VULVA AND VAGINAL 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?

A biopsy is a procedure by which a small sample of skin or tissue is removed so that it can be tested for abnormalities.

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 the infection can be treated with antibiotics and there are usually no long-term side effects.

Occasionally bleeding or collection of blood under the skin (haematoma) may occur at the biopsy site. This often is self limiting and rarely a second surgery may be required to treat it.

There may be a very small scar at the site of the biopsy.

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. This may mean that it takes longer to find the correct treatment for your condition.

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.

How can I prepare for a biopsy?

On the day of the procedure please take all your regular medications including aspirin and blood thinners unless you are advised otherwise. You can eat and drink as normally.

What happens during a biopsy?

The doctor or nurse will decide the best position for the biopsy. It is usually the part of the skin most affected by the condition. First, the area will be numbed with local anaesthetic injection 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 or Monsell's solution) to stop bleeding. This will leave a small black spot which will disappear when the skin heals, usually within seven days. You may need a small dissolvable stitch, 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.

What happens after a biopsy?

You can go home immediately after the biopsy. The local anaesthetics usually would wear off in couple of hours and you may need to take pain killers such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen if you are not allergic to. Please remember that it is normal for the area to be red and tender for the first few days. It can take up to three weeks for us to receive your biopsy results.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You are advised to observe any bleeding or excessive bruising using a hand mirror. If you are concerned you would want to contact the Emergency Gynaecology Assessment Unit on the number given below. It is important to keep the biopsy site clean and dry. We recommend that you do not wash the area for about 12 hours following the procedure. After a shower or bath, you should 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. Sometimes you may notice small amount of bleeding and it is normal. You may apply pressure to the area for about 10 minutes and usually the bleeding should settle.

You should avoid 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 not settling with pressure or bruising is excessive, please contact the Emergency Gynaecology Assessment Unit on 01905 761489 or go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E).

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Unless otherwise indicated, no follow up in the gynaecology outpatient is routinely arranged. You will be communicated with the results a copy of it will go to your doctor. This will usually take about 4-6 weeks. If you did not hear from the hospital within this time scale or if you have any questions or concerns about your biopsy, please contact the secretary of the consultant you been under for your condition.

If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PET@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Thursday from 8.30am to 4.30pm and Friday: 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that a voicemail service is in use at busy times, but messages will be returned as quickly as possible.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.