

Liver biopsy

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A patient's guide



What is it?

This is a piece of tissue taken from the liver for examination under a microscope and to look for any abnormalities.

Why do I need to have a liver biopsy?

Some people have been found to have abnormal liver blood tests or have abnormalities to the liver seen on a scan. A biopsy will help the doctors find out exactly what the problem is. Some people also need a biopsy done before starting treatment for conditions such as hepatitis C.

How is it done?

Only specialist doctors or nurses perform liver biopsy although it may be done in several different departments, usually in x-ray, on a ward or in endoscopy.

Before the procedure - some blood samples will be checked several days before your biopsy, including one which checks your bloods ability to clot. The forms are enclosed with your appointment letter. This is to minimise any risk and make sure that the biopsy can be performed safely. **It is important that you have these blood tests done otherwise it is not possible to do the biopsy.**

What are the risks of having the biopsy done?

The main risk is that of bleeding during or after the biopsy is taken. This risk is minimised by checking your blood tests before the biopsy and also by monitoring your condition throughout your stay.

Any questions?

If you have any worries or concerns, before the day of the biopsy, then you may contact the Gastroenterology Nurse Specialists on 020 7288 5692 for advice.

Who do I contact afterwards if I have any problems?

If you have any minor problems or concerns, then you may contact the nurse specialists on 020 7288 5692 during office hours, 9am – 4pm.

If you have any problems outside of these hours then you must either contact your GP surgery or go to the emergency department at your nearest hospital.

If you take medication you may continue this as normal unless you take any blood thinning medication (such as aspirin or warfarin) or any non-steroidal pain killers (such as neurofen, ibuprofen and celebrex).

You should stop these medications one week before the date of your biopsy.

If you take warfarin, please ask your doctor for instructions or telephone the contact number given at the end of this leaflet.

On the day

You may have a light breakfast (such as cereal or toast) at 7am but then you must have no more food until after the biopsy is done. You may drink fluids as normal. You will be admitted to hospital for a full day, but occasionally patients may be asked to stay overnight.

You will be shown to a bed/trolley where the biopsy will take place. You will be asked to put on a gown (you will not have to get completely undressed) so that your clothes do not get spoiled.

Once you are ready the doctor/nurse will explain the procedure to you, ask you to sign a consent form and your blood pressure and pulse will be checked.

Doing the biopsy

You will be asked to lie on your back so that the doctor/nurse has access to the right hand side of your abdomen where your liver is located.

A local anaesthetic is then administered to the biopsy area. This may sting just for a few seconds but will numb the area where the biopsy will be taken from.

After the biopsy has been taken you will be asked to lie on your right hand side so that the weight of your body presses on the area where the biopsy has been taken and to make sure that the wound closes and heals. You will be asked to stay in the department for 6-8 hours and you must remain lying on your right side or back for this time. The nurse will let you know when you can sit up.

Your blood pressure and pulse will be checked frequently during this time. This is to detect any signs of bleeding which may occur following a biopsy.

Afterwards

The doctor/nurse will tell you when you can go home (generally the same day). You must have someone that can take you home or alternatively let the staff know (in advance) if you need hospital transport. Occasionally, some people may need to stay in hospital overnight.

You may have some mild discomfort or pain after the biopsy, at the biopsy site or to the right shoulder, which responds to treatment with mild analgesia. This may persist for up to 24 hours.

Avoid undue physical exertion. You may return to work the next day if this is not hard physical work.

The biopsy result usually takes up to two weeks to be processed. You will be given, or sent by post, an appointment to come back to the outpatients' clinic for your results. The doctor will then discuss your condition and plan of care with you.