

Having a breast biopsy under x-ray (stereotactic) guidance

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Date published: 02/04/2013
Review date: 02/04/2015
Ref: Img/BBX/1

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A patient's guide



.... caring for you 

Why do I need this procedure?

Your mammogram shows microcalcifications (white flecks of calcium) or another abnormality in the breast that can only be seen on a mammogram. They cannot be seen using an ultrasound. It is possible to sample these abnormalities under a special mammogram machine using a suction biopsy device.

What happens during the procedure?

The procedure is done as an out patient in the mammography room. A consultant breast radiologist and mammographer will be present. Occasionally a trainee radiology doctor will also be present.

Before the biopsy takes place you will be asked to lie face down on a special x-ray table. This has a hole in it for the breast to hand through. The doctor and mammographer will work out of your sight underneath the table. They will be with you all the time and explain the procedure to you as they go along.

Your breast will be held in the same position throughout the biopsy which normally takes approximately 30 minutes. You will need to lie still throughout the procedure. Using a small needle local anaesthetic will be put into the breast to make the area numb.

The biopsy needle is then introduced through a small cut in the skin. A special suction device is used to collect the samples.

How much breast tissue is removed?

It is normal to take about 12 small pieces of tissue so that the laboratory can make an accurate diagnosis. Occasionally we will need to take more samples however this will be explained to you if necessary.

What is a marker clip and why do I need one?

A marker clip is a tiny metallic marker put in the breast after the biopsy in case you require surgery in the future. If you do not need any further surgery the marker will stay in your breast. It will not cause you any harm.

Does the procedure hurt?

A small area of your breast will be under compression throughout the procedure. This may be a little uncomfortable at first. The local anaesthetic used to numb the breast may sting for a few seconds before it takes effect. Most patients report the procedure is a little uncomfortable but not painful.

Are there any side effects?

The most common side effect is some bruising or bleeding around the area and discomfort following the biopsy. Less common side effects include infection.

Any further questions?

If you have any further questions please contact the breast care nurses:

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