

Having a skin biopsy

Dermatology Department
/ Haematology Department
Information for Patients

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What is a skin biopsy?

This is a medical procedure where we take a sample of your skin. We look at this skin (examined) under a microscope.

Photos of your skin lesion or rash

We will take photos of the skin lesion(s)/ rash that we remove or take a sample of in clinic. We do this when you are listed for a surgical procedure. We need to make sure that the surgery is done on the correct area(s). These photos are shared with the Dermatology team. If need we may also share them with other professionals who may be involved in your care such as a plastic surgeon.

Photos help us track changes in the lesion or rash. This is the case if there is a major change or the lesion grows quickly while you are waiting for surgery. We use a service called Consultant Connect or Photo Forwarding to take the photos. These are services used within the NHS as a safe and secure methods to take and share clinical photos. We will ask for your permission before taking photos of your skin.

Should someone come with me?

Depending on the type of procedure you have and your own level of health, you may need a relative or friend to come with you on the day. You may need someone to take you home after the procedure. For example, you may have difficulty driving if you have a procedure on your face and you are not be able to wear your glasses. Or if the procedure is on your leg, you cannot drive.

Please be aware that relatives **will not be** able to come into the surgical room with you during your procedure. This is unless you have a specific need. Children are **not allowed** into the surgical room. You will need to arrange childcare for them.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

Can I eat and drink before and after the procedure?

Yes. You can eat and drink as normal.

If you have the procedure on your face or by your mouth, the area will stay numb for a few hours afterwards. You will need to take extra care when eating hot food or having hot drinks after the procedure. This is because you may not feel the heat and could injure yourself.

Should I take my normal medication before the procedure?

Yes, please take your medication as normal. **This is unless the doctor or nurse advises you otherwise.** This includes any blood thinning medication such as:

- aspirin
- warfarin
- clopidogrel
- rivaroxaban

Warfarin does increase the risk of bleeding, but as it is an important medicine for you, we do not ask you to stop taking it for a minor surgical procedure.

We do ask that when you know the date for your surgery that you book in for a blood test to check your INR. Ideally this blood test needs to be taken within 5 days of the date of your surgery.

We ask you to contact the dermatology department to tell us your INR result as soon as this is available to you. You can phone the dermatology department on **0116 204 7842** or e-mail our team with the INR result at: uhl-tr.dermatologyadmin@nhs.net

Please include the following if you are calling or emailing us:

- "S" hospital number (this is at the top of the appointment letter) or NHS number
- Full name
- Date of birth
- INR result

In most cases the surgery can continue if your INR is less than 3.5.

If it is higher than this your surgery may need to be postponed until it is below this level.

For Haematology patients: if your doctor or nurse tells you that your skin biopsy will happen at the same time as a bone marrow aspirate, please refer to the bone marrow aspiration information sheet. Speak to your doctor or nurse for more advice about which medication to stop.

What happens during the procedure?

The exact way we do the procedure will be decided on the day once the doctor or nurse has examined you. They will tell you about how they will do the procedure. You can ask any questions you have before you agree to go ahead with the procedure.

The main types of procedures for skin biopsies are:

- **Diagnostic biopsy:** this is where a sample of skin is removed and sent for testing to help diagnose a range of skin conditions.
- **Excision biopsy:** this is where a visible abnormal lesion is removed. A sample of some of the skin around this area is also taken. The sample is sent for testing.
- **Biopsy for germline DNA:** if you have, or are suspected of having, an eligible haematological or genetic condition for a test called 'whole genome sequencing (WGS)', a skin biopsy may be needed to get a sample of the DNA you were born with. A sample of skin is removed from a suitable discreet location. It is sent to the laboratory for the DNA to be removed from it (extraction). For more information about the genomic test, please speak with your haematology or genetics team.

How long will the procedure take?

A diagnostic biopsy will take about 20 to 30 minutes.

An excision biopsy often takes around 30 to 60 minutes (1 hour). In some cases it can be longer.

We will tell you how long your procedure should take beforehand.

Will it be painful?

To make sure you feel no pain during the procedure, we will give you injections of local anaesthetic into the area. The injections can sometimes sting for a short while. The doctor or nurse will make sure the area is numb before starting. You will stay awake during the procedure.

The surgery will be painless but you may feel some skin movement and pressure.

How will the wound from the biopsy be closed?

The best way to close the wound will depend on the size, its location, and the flexibility of the skin around it:

- **Direct closure:** most wound edges can be closed in a straight line with stitches. Sometimes this is not possible and we may use other methods.
- **Skin flap:** one way to repair a larger wound is to use a 'skin flap'. This is when we take a flap of skin from next to the wound leaving it partly connected to its original blood supply. This flap is placed over the wound and stitched into place.

- **Skin graft:** in some cases we may need to take a 'skin graft' from another part of your body. This is when a piece of skin is removed from a 'donor site'. We then place this over the wound from the biopsy and stitched into place. This means you will have 2 wounds at the end of the procedure.
- **Open:** some wounds will not need any stitches and will be left open to heal by themselves.

You will not need to return to the hospital to have any stitches removed. If you do have stitches that need to be removed, you will need to book an appointment with the nurse at your local GP surgery. Dissolving stitches can take about 3 to 4 weeks to go away on their own.

What do I do if there is a change to my skin before surgery?

While you are waiting for surgery, if there are major changes to the lesion, or it grows quickly, then please call us on **0116 204 7842** or e-mail: uhl-tr.dermatologyadmin@nhs.net

We will ask you to send in a photograph of the lesion and, if possible, an up-to-date measurement of the lesion in millimetres or centimetres. For example, 2cm by 2cm or 6mm by 7mm. If you phone us we will ask you to send the photographs to: uhl-tr.skinphotos@nhs.net

Please note that you **must** phone us first or we will not know that you have e-mailed photographs.

If you email us at: uhl-tr.dermatologyadmin@nhs.net you could include the photographs as an attachment.

For all emails, please make sure the subject of the email includes the following 3 items:

1. Your "S" hospital number (this is at the top of your appointment letter) or NHS number.
2. Your full name.
3. Your date of birth.

Photographs will be confidential and accessible to the dermatology team. They might be shared with other doctors working in the hospital, such as the plastic surgery team. We only do this when we feel it is needed for your ongoing care. However, e-mailing photographs to us is not regarded as a secure or encrypted method of communication.

If you are concerned but are unable to photograph or measure the lesion, please do still contact us to let us know of your concern by phone or email. We will do our best to help.

What happens after the procedure?

We will clean the wound from the biopsy. We will put on a dressing. Once you feel ready you will be able to go home. We will give you aftercare leaflet to take home. The doctor or nurse will go through this leaflet with you. Visit: <https://yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/> and search for 'Care after a skin biopsy' or leaflet number: 423.

You can expect the following after the procedure:

- You can expect some bleeding during the procedure and it is normal to have some oozing of blood afterwards. If the wound continues to bleed you may need to apply pressure for 15 minutes to help it stop.
- The local anaesthetic will wear off after 2 to 3 hours. You may need a simple painkiller such as paracetamol to help with pain.
- It is common to get bruising or swelling close to the wound. If the procedure is done around the eyes, forehead and nose, this may cause a black eye for a few days.

What are the risks of having this procedure?

- There is a small risk of a wound infection, or the stitches may come apart causing the wound to re-open. We will give you aftercare advice to help with this.
- You will have a scar but over time this will become less noticeable. However, movement and contraction of the wound as it heals can sometimes cause problems with the nearby structures such as eyelids, lips or nostrils. If this does happen, it may be possible to improve this at a later date.
- Sometimes after an excision biopsy, some patients may need to return for more surgery. This is because the lesion or growth extends further into the skin than expected.

Can I return to work after my procedure?

We often advise you not to go back to work on the day of your procedure. This often depends on the procedure you have had. You can talk about this with your doctor or nurse.

Depending on the size and location of your surgery it may be better to avoid physical activity until the wound has healed.

Will I need to return to the hospital after the procedure?

Dermatology patients: not everyone needs to come back to clinic. We may give you a date for a follow-up appointment on the day of your procedure. Or the doctor may decide they need to see the biopsy results first. Once the results are available you will get the results in a letter or be given a date for a follow-up appointment. **If you have not got your result letter or a clinic appointment within 2 months, please contact the medical secretaries on 0116 258 5762.**

Haematology patients: you will get an appointment with your haematology team to talk about the next steps.

