

Invasive and Diagnostic Breast Biopsy

What is a breast biopsy?

A breast biopsy is a procedure for removal of a small piece of tissue from your breast. The tissue is studied under a microscope to look for cancer or other diseases.

When is it used?

Your healthcare provider will probably do a breast biopsy if:

- You have a lump in your breast that can be felt and your provider thinks it could be cancer.
- You have an ultrasound scan that shows a possible tumor.
- Your mammogram shows an abnormal area.
- Your MRI shows an abnormal area.
- One of your nipples has an abnormality, such as crusting, sores, dimpling of the skin, or bleeding.

How do I prepare for a breast biopsy?

- If you need a minor pain reliever in the week before the procedure, consult your provider.
- If you are taking daily aspirin for a medical condition, ask your provider if you need to stop taking it before the procedure.
- You may be given a sedative so you should not eat or drink anything for 12 hours before surgery.

What happens during the procedure?

The type of biopsy you have depends on the kind of lump or abnormality your healthcare provider thinks you have.

You are given a local anesthetic. The anesthetic numbs just the skin and tissues that will be cut or punctured. You may also be given a sedative. A sedative helps you relax and may put you to sleep.

The 2 main types of breast biopsies are:

- **Needle biopsy** – A small amount of tissue is removed from the abnormal area of your breast with a small needle. It may be guided by X-rays or ultrasound.
- **Surgical biopsy (incisional or excisional)** - A piece of breast tissue is cut out. Before surgery you may be sent to the X-ray department so your breast can be marked with a small wire placed in the abnormal area.

What happens after the procedure?

After surgery, you should avoid strenuous activities for a few days to prevent bleeding. You may have swelling or bruising around the biopsy site. This will gradually go away in 2 to 3 weeks. If you have stitches, try to keep your wound dry when you bathe to prevent infection.

A few weeks after the procedure, you may be asked to return for a follow-up exam using mammography, ultrasound or MRI. Your healthcare provider will inform you if a follow-up exam is required.

In the future it may be hard for you to feel any new lumps in the biopsied area because scar tissue may have formed. You may also have a small ridge on your breast caused by scar tissue and stitches. After your breast heals, ask your healthcare provider to show you how to do breast self-exams so you can tell the difference between scar tissue and new lumps.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

The biopsy helps your provider find out whether the abnormal area in the breast is cancerous or non-cancerous. If it is cancerous, you and your provider will decide on a treatment plan.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

- The local anesthetic may not numb the area quite enough and you may feel some minor discomfort.
- You may have bruising around the biopsy site.
- You may have infection or bleeding at the site of the biopsy.