

Skin Biopsy of the Face

A biopsy of the skin in the region of the face, head and neck is a simple procedure performed in the out-patients department under local anaesthesia. The reason for undertaking this minor surgery is to either remove a lesion in its entirety or to have a better understanding of what it is, by looking at a small section of a skin lesion under the microscope. This can help to diagnose and plan future treatment.

Types of skin biopsy

There are different types of biopsies. All tissue excised will be sent for analysis. Usually on the face, the surgeon will either remove the whole lesion, called an excisional biopsy, or will remove just a small section of the lesion for diagnostic purposes, called an incisional biopsy. Following an incisional biopsy, further treatment may be required once we have a better understanding of what the lesion is.

Before the procedure

- Eat and drink as normal, it is recommended to have a light meal beforehand.
- Ensure you have some painkillers available such as Paracetamol, the surgeon will recommend a simple painkiller for immediately after the procedure
- Bring a list of your medications with you
- Continue to take Aspirin and Clopidogrel as normal. The surgeon will advise you what to do if you are taking Warfarin. If you are taking other blood thinning medications such as Dabigatran, Apixaban or Rivaroxaban, the surgeon will advise you to omit the dose the day before and on the day of surgery.

During your appointment

Your appointment will be 30-40 minutes long. The skin biopsy will be performed under local anaesthetic so the area will feel numb and it will not hurt. You may feel some light pressure. The surgeon will use stitches (sutures) to close the small wound. These may require removal at a later stage. The surgeon will tell you if this is the case. You may also require some 'paper stitches' (steristrips) to help support the wound during the early healing period.

Risks involved with a skin biopsy

Bleeding and bruising: The surgeon will stop any bleeding however it is normal to experience a small amount of oozing after the procedure. You will be given some swabs to take away with you. If you do experience some bleeding, use a damp swab to press on the area. Sit upright and do not lean forward. Press on the wound for 5 minutes.

Scarring: It is impossible to cut the skin without leaving a small mark or scar. The surgeon will plan your skin biopsy to minimise this. Most individuals will initially experience some redness and a degree of lumpiness in the area of the wound. This is part of the normal healing and gradually the redness will fade and lumpiness will disperse.

Infection: This is an unlikely event, however if the wound becomes swollen, red, painful or starts discharging please follow the **What should I do if there is a problem?** advice at the end of this leaflet.

Numbness: You may experience a small area of numbness around the wound. This should improve as the area heals but can take several months.

After Care

After your skin biopsy:

- Rest for 12 hours. Please avoid strenuous exercise for 48 hours.
- Take some simple painkillers (that you would usually use for a headache) before the local anaesthetic wears off.
- If the wound has been covered with an antibiotic ointment at the end of your surgery, please continue to apply regularly until the stitches are removed. You will be supplied with this medicine.
- Avoid getting soap in the area for 48 hours.
- Organise to have the stitches removed at your GP practise with the nurse, as advised by your surgeon.

Follow-up

Depending on the situation you may be asked to return to clinic in 1-4 weeks to discuss the results of the biopsy, and plan further treatment if necessary. Sometimes you will not be required to return to clinic, instead the biopsy results will be posted to both you and your GP. This can take 6-8 weeks.

What should I do if there is a problem?

If you have problems following treatment, please call one of the numbers listed below.

Monday to Friday, 0900-1700 hours

01392 402216
01392 403711
01392 403320

Out of Hours

For emergency advice regarding increasing swelling or bleeding, please contact or visit your GP or attend the Emergency Department.

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

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