

Breast biopsy - ultrasound

Definition

A breast biopsy is the removal of breast tissue to examine it for signs of breast cancer or other disorders.

There are several types of breast biopsies, including stereotactic, ultrasound-guided, MRI-guided, and excisional breast biopsy. This article focuses on needle-based, ultrasound-guided breast biopsies.

Alternative Names

Biopsy - breast - ultrasound; Ultrasound-guided breast biopsy; Core needle breast biopsy - ultrasound; Breast cancer - breast biopsy - ultrasound; Abnormal mammogram - breast biopsy - ultrasound

How the Test is Performed

You are asked to undress from the waist up. You wear a robe that opens in the front. During the biopsy, you are awake.

You lie on your back.

The biopsy is done in the following way:

- The health care provider cleans the area on your breast.
- Numbing medicine is injected.
- The doctor makes a very small cut on your breast over the area that needs to be biopsied.
- The doctor uses an ultrasound machine to guide the needle to the abnormal area in your breast that needs to be biopsied.
- Several small pieces of tissue are taken.
- A small metal clip may be placed into the breast in the area of the biopsy to mark it, if needed.

The biopsy is done using one of the following:

- Fine needle aspiration
- Hollow needle (called a core needle)
- Vacuum-powered device
- Both a hollow needle and vacuum-powered device

Once the tissue sample has been taken, the needle is removed. Ice and pressure are applied to the site to stop any bleeding. A bandage is applied to absorb any fluid. You do not need any stitches after the needle is taken out. If needed, strips of tape may be placed to close the wound.

How to Prepare for the Test

The provider will ask about your medical history and perform a manual breast exam.

If you take blood thinning medicines (including aspirin, supplements, or herbs), ask your doctor whether you need to stop taking these before the biopsy.

Tell your doctor if you may be pregnant.

DO NOT use lotion, perfume, powder, or deodorant underneath your arms or on your breasts.

How the Test will Feel

When the numbing medicine is injected, it may sting a bit.

During the procedure, you may feel slight discomfort or light pressure.

After the test, the breast may be sore and tender to the touch for several days. You will be given instructions about what activities you can do, how to take care of your breast, and what medicines you can take for pain.

You may have some bruising, and there will be a very small scar where the needle was inserted.

Why the Test is Performed

An ultrasound-guided breast biopsy may be done to evaluate abnormal findings on a mammogram, breast ultrasound, or MRI.

To determine whether someone has breast cancer, a biopsy must be done. Tissue from the abnormal area is removed and examined under a microscope.

Normal Results

A normal result means there is no sign of cancer or other breast problems.

Your provider will let you know if and when you need a follow-up ultrasound, mammogram or other tests.

What Abnormal Results Mean

A biopsy can identify a number of breast conditions that are not cancer or precancer, including:

- Fibroadenoma (breast lump that usually isn't cancer)
- Fat necrosis

Biopsy results may show conditions such as:

- Atypical ductal hyperplasia
- Atypical lobular hyperplasia
- Flat epithelial atypia
- Intraductal papilloma
- Lobular carcinoma-in-situ
- Radial scar

Abnormal results may mean that you have breast cancer. Two main types of breast cancer may be found:

- Ductal carcinoma starts in the tubes (ducts) that move milk from the breast to the nipple. Most breast cancers are of this type.
- Lobular carcinoma starts in parts of the breast called lobules, which produce milk.

Depending on the biopsy results, you may need further surgery or treatment.

Your provider will discuss the meaning of the biopsy results with you.

Risks

There is a slight chance of infection at the injection or incision site. Excessive bleeding is rare.

References

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