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Liver or kidney biopsy in Radiology

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Patient information

Having a liver or kidney biopsy in Radiology



This information answers some of the questions you may have about having a liver or kidney biopsy. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the doctor who referred you for the procedure or with the radiology department.

What is a biopsy?

A biopsy is a medical test where a small sample of tissue is removed from your liver/kidney with a needle. The sample is then examined under a microscope.

What are the benefits of having a biopsy?

A biopsy will help our doctors make a correct diagnosis so that you can get suitable treatment. Investigations have shown an abnormality in your liver or kidney, but it is not always possible to determine the cause or degree of these abnormalities by looking at scans alone. The simplest way to make a diagnosis is to examine a sample of tissue under the microscope.

What are the risks of having a biopsy?

- There is a small risk of internal bleeding after the biopsy. If you take anticoagulant medicines (eg aspirin or warfarin – you maybe asked to stop taking these prior) or if you have a bleeding disorder there may be a greater chance of bleeding. You will stay in hospital for four to six hours after the biopsy so that we can monitor you.
- There may be bruising or a small swelling around the biopsy area due to bleeding into the skin. This should not be painful and will heal.

Are there any alternatives?

A biopsy is the only way for your doctor to get the information needed to make a correct diagnosis and treat your illness.

Who will be performing the biopsy?

A specially trained doctor called an interventional radiologist will perform the biopsy. The radiologist will use ultrasound to place the needle accurately into the liver/kidney.

Giving consent

The interventional radiologist will ask your permission to perform the biopsy. He or she will explain the procedure to you and make sure that you understand the risks and benefits. If there is anything you don't understand you can ask the radiologist. You will be asked to sign a consent form that says you understand and have agreed to the procedure.

Having the biopsy is your decision. You can change your mind at any time, even if you have signed the consent form. Let staff know immediately if you change your mind or if you need more time to think about it.

How can I prepare for the procedure?

You will come into hospital in the morning, have the biopsy and go home the same day. You will need to arrange for someone to take you home by car or taxi.

You will need to have a blood test about one week before the biopsy to check that your blood clotting is normal. This will be arranged by the doctor who has referred you for the biopsy or by the radiology department when your scan is booked.

If you are taking anticoagulants (blood thinning medicines) or have any allergies, please call the radiology department at Watford General Hospital on 01923 217529 as your appointment may have to be rescheduled.

Unless told otherwise by the booking team, you can have a light breakfast on the day of your biopsy and will be able to eat and drink normally after the procedure.

Your appointment letter will tell you what time to arrive at the hospital and where to go on the day of the procedure. When you arrive, either to the ward or X-ray department, you will be asked to change into a hospital gown, and you will be given a bed. It may be necessary to repeat the blood tests on the day of the procedure.

What happens during the biopsy?

You will be brought to the radiology department in your bed if reporting to the ward, and remain in bed for the procedure or brought into the room if coming straight to the X-ray department. Your skin will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution and some of your body will be covered with sterile towels. The radiologist will wear sterile gloves.

The radiologist will use the ultrasound machine or CT scanner to find the most suitable point for inserting the biopsy needle then inject local anaesthetic around this area to numb the area, so you do not feel pain. The radiologist then uses a special needle to remove a small piece of tissue. The wound site is cleaned, and a dressing put over it.

While the first part of the procedure may seem to take a while, the actual biopsy does not take very long at all.

Will it hurt?

When the local anaesthetic is injected, it will sting to start with, but this soon passes. You may be aware of the biopsy needle passing into your body, but this is generally done so quickly that it does not cause a great deal of discomfort. You may experience some discomfort after the procedure, your radiologist may prescribe some pain relief that can be taken immediately after the procedure.

What happens after the biopsy?

After the biopsy you will go back to the ward to recover. You will be asked to lie on your side or on your back for two to three hours to help the healing process. You will need to stay in bed for four to six hours. Your blood pressure, pulse and temperature will be checked at regular intervals to check all is well. The nurse will tell you when you can get up and move around.

When the team looking after you are satisfied that you are well enough to go home you will be discharged from the hospital. You will need a responsible adult to take you home by car or taxi and have someone stay with you overnight.

You should rest for 24 hours following the biopsy and we advise you not to drive during this time.

When will I receive the results of the biopsy?

The results will take about seven to ten working days. You will need to make an appointment with the doctor who referred you for the biopsy to get your results.

Unfortunately, not all biopsies are successful. If the area to be sampled is very small or difficult to get to, the piece of tissue obtained may be normal tissue rather than abnormal tissue. Sometimes, although abnormal tissue has been obtained, it may not be enough for the pathologist to make a definite diagnosis. The radiologist who performs your biopsy may be able to give you some idea as to the chance of obtaining a satisfactory sample.

Further Information:

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Radiology Department Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm.

Tel: **01923 217529**

How to contact us

Department name

[Watford General Hospital](#)

Vicarage Road

Watford

Hertfordshire WD18 0HB

Hospital switchboard: 01923 244366

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