

Having a skin biopsy

This leaflet explains what a skin biopsy is and the benefits, risks and alternatives of this procedure. If you have any questions, please speak to your doctor or nurse.

What is a skin biopsy and why do I need it?

A skin biopsy is a routine investigation that helps us to diagnose skin conditions. It can also be used as a treatment to remove some abnormalities, such as moles. A biopsy is where a small sample of skin is removed under local anaesthetic to look at it under the microscope. Local anaesthetic is a medication that numbs the specific area of the body so it is pain free, but does not put you to sleep.

There are no alternatives to this procedure; it is the only way to get the information needed to make a correct diagnosis.

Before your biopsy

Please let the staff looking after you know if you are taking any antiplatelet medicines (such as aspirin or clopidogrel) or any anticoagulant medicines (such as warfarin or rivaroxaban) as they may increase the risk of bleeding during and after the procedure. The doctor at your consultation will advise you if you need to stop any of your medicines before your biopsy.

If you are taking warfarin, please visit your local warfarin clinic two to three days before your surgery date and have your INR checked. If it is below 2 or above 3.5, please contact The Christie, as your biopsy date may need to be rearranged.

Please let us know if you have any allergies to medications including local anaesthetic, or if you are planning to travel within two weeks after your biopsy, as this will affect arrangements for removing your stitches (if you have them).

Because some people feel light-headed after their biopsy, **you should not drive to your appointment** and should have someone to help you home.

You can eat and drink as normal before your appointment.

Giving consent (permission)

We will ask you to sign a consent form agreeing to accept the treatment that you are being offered. The basis of the agreement is that you have had The Christie's written description of the proposed treatment and that you have been given an opportunity to discuss any concerns. You are entitled to request a second opinion from another doctor who specialises in treating this cancer. You can ask your own consultant or your GP to refer you. Your consent may be withdrawn at any time before or during this treatment. Should you decide to withdraw your consent then a member of your treating team will discuss the possible consequences with you.



What happens during my skin biopsy?

The biopsy will be performed by either a doctor or a specialist nurse. We will give an injection of local anaesthetic to the area where the biopsy will be taken. This may sting for a few seconds, but then the area will feel numb. You may feel pulling or pressure on the area when we take the biopsy, but it should not be painful. We will take a sample of tissue by cutting or scraping your skin. We may have to take more than one biopsy, depending on your circumstances. If we close your wound(s) with stitches, you will need to have these removed at your GP surgery.

The whole procedure is usually completed within 30 minutes.

What happens after the procedure?

A nurse will dress your wound and explain how to look after it at home.

Please make sure you receive a separate aftercare information sheet before you leave hospital. If you have stitches, your nurse will also discuss arrangements for their removal and will give you a letter to give to the nurse at your GP practice. You will be able to leave hospital as soon as you feel well enough, and can eat and drink as soon as you wish. **Do not drive yourself home from hospital.**

Will I have any pain or discomfort?

The local anaesthetic will begin to wear off about 30 - 40 minutes after the operation. If you experience any discomfort from your wound, you can take simple painkillers such as paracetamol to help with this. **Always follow the instructions on the packet and never take more than the recommended dose.**

Check that the painkillers will not react with any other medicines you are taking. If you are unsure or if you have allergies to any medicines, speak to your pharmacist.

What are the risks?

We will discuss the risks with you in detail before we ask you to sign the consent form. Short-term risks include infection, bleeding and swelling of your wound. Although the biopsies taken are not large, you will have a small scar in the long term.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

We will arrange a follow-up appointment to discuss the results of your biopsy with you.

If you have any problems or worries, please contact:

Andrea Whitmore, research nurse on **0161 918 7963** or email andrea.whitmore@christie.nhs.uk

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

