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Core Biopsy of the Breast Imaging Department

Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email pals@asph.nhs.uk. If you remain concerned, PALS can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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Are there any risks associated with core biopsy?

It should be stressed that the answer is generally no.

Occasionally there may be some bleeding inside the breast and a bruise or swelling (haematoma) will form.

There is a potential risk of introducing infection and you should contact your referring doctor if you experience redness or heat in the breast after the procedure.

What is a core biopsy of the breast?

While a fine needle aspiration takes a few cells from an abnormal area within the breast, a core biopsy removes a larger piece of breast tissue for analysis. It is performed using an automatic spring loaded biopsy needle. The needle is attached to a small device or 'gun' which quickly fires the needle into the lump and takes a narrow tubular core of tissue from it.

Core biopsy of the breast may be used to characterize a lump felt on clinical examination, or abnormalities seen on mammography or breast ultrasound.

Preparing for a core biopsy

No specific preparation is necessary.

If you are taking any medication to thin the blood (anti-coagulants) you should inform the x-ray staff when making your appointment. It may be necessary to stop the medication for a few days prior to the biopsy to reduce bruising.

What does a core biopsy entail?

Breast biopsy is done as an out patient procedure under local anaesthetic.

Breast ultrasound or mammography is used to guide the biopsy to ensure that the correct area is sampled.

If the abnormality to be biopsied is visible on ultrasound scanning, then the biopsy will be performed using ultrasound for guidance. The radiologist will place the ultrasound probe on the breast as the needle is introduced.

If the abnormality can only be seen on the mammogram then mammography will be used to guide the procedure (stereo-tactic guidance). This will require the breast to be compressed in the same way as for a mammogram, but for a longer period, while the needle is put into the breast.

The skin overlying the abnormality will be cleaned with antiseptic solution. A small needle is then used to introduce the local anaesthetic to the area. This stings initially but then numbs the skin for the rest of the procedure. A small nick is made in the skin and then the biopsy needle is introduced into the breast. It is very important to keep very still during the biopsy. The radiologist advances the needle to the correct position and then takes the sample. As the sample is taken the biopsy needle will make a loud clicking sound. The needle is then removed and firm pressure applied to the breast to reduce bruising.

Often one or two biopsies are sufficient when the procedure is performed under ultrasound guidance.

When the biopsy is performed under stereo-tactic guidance (using the mammogram machine) it is usual to take at least six biopsies. These will all be taken through the same nick in the skin.

A small dressing is placed over the biopsy site at the end of the procedure

An ultrasound guided biopsy will take 10-15 minutes and a stereo-tactic (mammogram guided) biopsy will take approximately 30 minutes.

What happens after the core biopsy?

Both the radiology report and the result of the biopsy analysis from the pathology lab will be sent to your referring doctor. You will need to make an appointment to see your referring doctor to discuss the results. You should allow 5-7 working days for the pathology report to be available.

Will the core biopsy hurt?

You will experience some stinging as the local anaesthetic is introduced, but this area soon becomes numb. If there is bruising and a swelling (haematoma) forms you may experience some discomfort for a few days afterwards. This should be relieved by pain-killers which you can purchase at the chemist. e.g. Paracetamol or Ibuprofen tablets.