

Breast/axilla (under arm) ultrasound

Radiology Department

Tel: 01271 370217

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

What is a breast/axilla (under arm) ultrasound scan?

Ultrasound uses sound to produce images of the inside of your body.

A special gel is applied to the skin to make contact between the ultrasound probe and your skin. The probe is moved over the area of the breast/axilla (under arm/armpit) being examined. This produces an image on a screen, which clinicians can use to understand what's happening inside your body.

Why have I been referred for this scan?

Your referring clinician has requested this scan because of a symptom that you have noticed.

If you have had a recent mammogram, we have called you back for an ultrasound following this examination. Please do not be too concerned as there are a variety of reasons why patients are recalled for an ultrasound following a mammogram. The results are normal for most patients recalled for further tests.

What happens during the scan?

You will be taken into the ultrasound room and asked to uncover the area to be examined.

Warm gel will be applied to your skin and the clinician will systematically ultrasound the area. This requires a very high level of concentration and we ask that only essential carers accompany you into the scan room, which includes parents of young patients.

The clinician will look at the ultrasound images during the scan, and if an abnormal area is noticed, they may decide it is necessary to carry out a needle test (aspiration or core biopsy) of this area.

- An aspiration is carried out when the area contains fluid. It involves using a small needle and syringe to withdraw the fluid (from cysts, for example).

- A core biopsy (tissue sample) is carried out for areas that are not fluid. It involves local anaesthetic being injected to numb the surrounding skin and tissues, which may sting very slightly. A small cut will be made in the skin and several samples of tissue will be taken with a special needle that makes a clicking noise. Once the core biopsy has been performed, the samples will be sent to pathology to be analysed. The cut is so small; it does not require any stitches. A small adhesive dressing will be applied and you will be given instructions on how to look after this following the procedure.

What preparations are needed?

You do not need to make any special preparations for this scan. If you are taking drugs to thin the blood, such as warfarin, heparin or aspirin, or if you have a problem with your blood clotting, please call the radiology nurse for advice on 01271 311869, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. If you are taking warfarin, it is helpful to bring your most recent INR result with you.

Are there any risks?

Ultrasound is one of the safest ways to examine what's happening inside the body. It does not use x-rays or require injections of dye. Ultrasound has not been shown to have any harmful side effects in medical use.

With a needle test, it is possible, but unusual, to experience severe bruising or infection after the test. On very rare occasions, the chest wall may be punctured, which can result in the partial collapse of the lungs. However, there are trained staff and facilities to treat this immediately in the unlikely event that it should happen.

Results

Once the ultrasound scan is done, the results will be analysed by the clinician and these are discussed with you at the time of the appointment, unless further tests are required. A copy of these results will also be sent to the referring clinician.

If you have had a needle test an appointment will be made for you to see your referring clinician for these results. Results usually take 7-10 days.

Further information

For further information please contact the Radiology Department on 01271 370217, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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