

Information about skin biopsy

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Introduction

Biopsies of the skin in the region of the head and neck are generally simple procedures which are performed in the outpatient department under local anaesthesia (numbing injections). The reason for undertaking this minor surgery is to either completely remove a lesion or to have a better understanding of what it is, by looking at a small part of the skin lesion under the microscope. This can help to diagnose and plan future treatment.

Types of skin biopsy

Excisional biopsy – removal of the whole lesion

Incisional biopsy – removing part of the lesion to see what it is and to determine whether further treatment is needed

Before the procedure

- Eat and drink as normal. It is recommended to have a light meal beforehand.
- Ensure you have some painkillers available such as paracetamol. The surgeon will recommend a simple painkiller for use after the procedure.
- Bring a list of your medications with you.
- Continue to take aspirin and clopidogrel as normal. The surgeon will advise you if you are taking warfarin. If you are taking dabigatran, apixaban or rivaroxaban, do not take the morning dose on the day of operation.

During the procedure

The procedure will take 30-40 minutes. The skin biopsy will be performed under local anaesthetic so the area will feel numb and it will not hurt. You may feel some light pressure. The surgeon will use stitches to close the small wound. These may require removal at a later stage. The surgeon will tell you if this is the case.

Risks involved with a skin biopsy

Bleeding and bruising

The surgeon will stop any bleeding, however it is normal to experience a small amount of oozing after the procedure. You will be given some swabs to take away with you. If you do experience some bleeding, use a damp swab to press on the area. Sit upright and do not lean forward. Press on the wound for 5 minutes.

Scarring

It is impossible to cut the skin without leaving a small mark or scar. The surgeon will plan your skin biopsy to minimise this. Most patients will initially experience some redness and a degree of lumpiness in the area of the wound. This is part of normal healing and gradually the redness will fade and lumpiness will reduce.

Infection

This is an unlikely event, however if the wound becomes painful or starts weeping, please phone the number below and speak to the on-call doctor.

Numbness

You may experience a small area of numbness around the wound. This should improve as the area heals but can take several months.

After care

After your skin biopsy:

- Rest for 12 hours. Please avoid strenuous exercise for 48 hours.
- Take some simple painkillers (that you would usually use for a headache) before the local anaesthetic wears off.
- If the wound has been covered with an antibiotic ointment at the end of your surgery, please continue to apply regularly until the stitches are removed. You will be supplied with this medicine.
- Avoid getting soap in the area for 48 hours.
- Organise to have the stitches removed at your GP practice with the nurse, as advised by your surgeon.

Follow-up

Depending on the situation, you may be asked to return to clinic in 2-4 weeks to discuss the results of the biopsy. Sometimes you will not be required to return to clinic, instead the biopsy results will be posted to you. This can take 6-8 weeks.

What should I do if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns such as prolonged bleeding, increased swelling or severe pain and would like to speak to a doctor, please call the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery on 01271 322477.

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 email 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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