

Vulval biopsy

This information leaflet answers some of the questions you may have when undergoing a vulval biopsy.

What is a vulval biopsy?

A biopsy is the removal of a small piece of tissue from a person for the purpose of testing that piece of tissue. In your case, the biopsy is to be taken from the vulva.

Why do I need a biopsy from the vulva?

You may have a problem in the vulval area. This may be pain, itching, an ulcer, a lump, blisters or a rash. Sometimes it is not possible to know exactly what is wrong with the skin just from looking or by taking other tests such as blood tests or swabs. If this is the case, then a biopsy can often give very useful information that can help to make a diagnosis or to suggest suitable treatment.

Where and when will the biopsy be done?

The biopsy is a small procedure and is usually done in the gynaecology outpatients department. You may be asked to come back on another day for the biopsy or it may be done on the same day as your clinic appointment.

What will happen in the biopsy room?

- You will be asked to undress below the waist and rest on your back on a couch. This may be a normal couch or it may be one in which your legs are lifted up into supports.
- The skin at the site of the biopsy will be anaesthetised with local anaesthetic. This is usually done with a small needle injection and may be uncomfortable for a minute or two.

- When the skin is numb, a piece of skin will be removed – this is usually about 0.5cm. The site of the biopsy will be closed with stitches.

Will I have stitches?

A biopsy makes a hole in the skin that usually has to be closed with one or more stitches. The stitches may need to be removed after five to ten days or the type of stitch used may dissolve and fall out by itself. Occasionally the hole in the skin made by the biopsy can be closed without stitches. The doctor or nurse should be able to tell you before the biopsy if they plan not to use stitches.

How long with the biopsy take?

It usually takes five to ten minutes from the time you go into the room until you go out again.

How long will it take for the anaesthetic to wear off?

The anaesthetic usually wears off after about half an hour. The biopsy site may feel a little sore. It may help to take a simple pain killer such as paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Will I be able to drive home?

Having a biopsy taken from the skin is about the same, in terms of discomfort and worry, as having a filling at the dentists. If you know that you feel tired after something like that, you may feel better to arrange for someone to take you home afterwards.

It is a good idea to rest for a couple of hours after the biopsy to minimise the chance of bleeding from the wound. It is advisable to avoid heavy work or prolonged standing for the rest of the day after a this procedure.

Can I wash or go to the toilet after the biopsy?

If you have the opportunity to wash the vulval skin with plain water after passing urine water, you will find that soothing. Otherwise, you can just wipe the skin gently with paper as normal.

When you have your bowels open, make sure that you wipe the skin in a direction away from the vulva, to keep the biopsy site as clean as possible. Again, if you have the opportunity to rinse the skin fully after going to the toilet, that will help to keep the wound as clean as possible.

Please continue to wash the vulval skin every day as normal. It is best to wash the skin with water alone.

This is easiest in a shower but, if you do take a bath, avoid soaking in the bath after the biopsy to allow the wound to dry out.

After washing, it is important that you dry the area thoroughly. This can be done by gently dabbing the area (do not rub).

When can I get back to normal after the biopsy?

It will take a few days for the skin to heal up and you will probably find the area is tender.

It may sting when you pass urine and you may find that loose clothes are more comfortable for a couple of days.

Vigorous exercise such as running, cycling, horse riding etc should be avoided for a few days after the biopsy as the area is likely to be uncomfortable and the biopsy site will be fragile.

You can resume sexual intercourse after three or four days if the area is fully comfortable.

If you are a regular swimmer, you can start swimming again after the stitches have been removed or dissolved or after the biopsy site has healed fully.

What are the risks of having a vulval biopsy?

There are some small risks from a procedure like a vulva biopsy. They are:

- The biopsy may leave a small scar on the skin.
- There will be some bleeding at the time of the biopsy but the doctor will aim to stop this before you leave the biopsy couch. Occasionally, the bleeding may start up again later on in the day. If this happens, you should press on the skin for fifteen minutes whilst resting lying down. If the bleeding does not stop then, you should contact the clinic or the Accident and Emergency Unit at your local hospital.
- The small wound in the skin can allow infection to get into the body.

If this happens, the site of the biopsy will feel more uncomfortable and hot as the days go by and may start to ooze. If this happens, you should contact your doctor as you may need antibiotic treatment.

When will I get the result?

The result of the testing of the piece of vulval skin usually comes through after two to three weeks. Your doctor or nurse will arrange to contact you or see you again when the result is through and to talk about any treatment that might be advised. If you have not heard anything by six weeks after the biopsy, please contact the clinic in case we have had difficulty in contacting you.

Contact Numbers

Doncaster Royal Infirmary

Ward G5 01302 642649 or 01302 642650.

Gynaecology Outpatients Department 01302 642804

Bassetlaw Hospital

Ward B6 Tel: 01909 572453 or 572544

Gynaecology Outpatient Department Tel: 01909 572214.

Montagu Hospital

Rockingham Ward, Tel: 01709 321107

Gynaecology Out-Patient Clinic, Tel: 01709 321113.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

The team are available to help with any concerns/complaints you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

The contact details are:

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059

Email: dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net

Gynaecology
