

Excisional Breast Biopsy

What Is An Excisional Breast Biopsy?

A biopsy removes tissue from your breast to be checked for cancer or other breast diseases. Your doctor may recommend an excisional biopsy after a mammogram shows a mass that doesn't look right. It is called an excisional biopsy because your doctor will remove the whole lump of tissue.

An excisional biopsy is usually done in an operating room. You may get medicines through a vein in your hand or arm (IV) to make you sleep, called general anesthesia. Or you may get medicines to help you relax and a shot to numb your breast, called local anesthesia.

What Are the Risks of an Excisional Biopsy?

As with any surgery, complications can happen. The main risks are bleeding and infection. Infection is a very low risk. Most bleeding is minor and happens during and shortly after the biopsy. In some cases, blood collects within the breast, creating a tender lump that looks bruised. This will heal with time like any normal bruise.

If you get general anesthesia, other risks may apply. Your doctor will tell you about these before the surgery.

Do I Need to Prepare for the Biopsy?

If you have general anesthesia, you will need to stop eating for a certain number of hours before the procedure, generally after midnight the night before.

What Happens Before the Biopsy?

The surgeon who performs the biopsy will visit with you. He or she will discuss the procedure, get your consent, and answer your questions.

What Happens During the Biopsy?

1. Before the procedure, the nurse will ask you to remove your clothing and give you a gown to wear. The team will clean the skin over the surgical site with a germ-killing solution.
2. The nurse may start an IV line in your arm or hand. You may also get medicine to help you relax.
3. If you get local anesthesia, you will feel a needle stick to numb the breast tissue. If you get general anesthesia, a specialist doctor (anesthesiologist) will watch your heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, and blood oxygen level during the surgery.
4. If the breast lump is hard to locate, the surgical team may use ultrasound or X-rays to place a radioactive seed into the lump. Then, the surgeon follows the signal from the seed to the breast lump and removes it along with the lump. He or she may also use other X-ray-guided procedures.
5. The surgeon will make a small cut in the breast to expose the lump and remove part or all of it. He or she may place a clip to mark the site.
6. The surgeon will close the cut with stitches or adhesive strips and put a sterile bandage over it.
7. The surgeon will send the removed tissue to the lab for tests.

What Happens After the Biopsy?

If you received general anesthesia, the team will take you to the recovery room. Once your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing are stable and you are awake, nurses will take you to your hospital room or send you home. If you are sent home, you should plan to have another person drive you.

What is a Clip?

A clip is a tiny piece of titanium, the same material used in joint replacements. You will not be able to feel it, and it won't set off any alarms. The clip marks the area that was biopsied for future reference.

If the tissue sample removed during the biopsy shows abnormal or cancer cells and more surgery is needed, the clip marks where the tissue came from. If the tissue sample shows no cancer, the clip remains in your breast to show that the area was biopsied.

When Will I Get the Results?

Results are usually ready in seven business days. Your doctor will call you with the results.

Should I Avoid Any Activities After the Biopsy?

Yes. Please follow these guidelines to allow the breast to heal as quickly as possible.

The day of your biopsy

- Avoid any activity that will move or bounce the breast very much, such as jogging or vacuuming.
- Avoid lifting anything heavier than a gallon of milk, about 8 pounds.
- Do not allow the wound to get wet for 24 hours after the biopsy.
- Follow the instructions you are given to care for the wound dressing. Ask a member of your health care team if you have any questions.
- If you are sent home immediately after the surgery, take it easy. Most women take the day off work to rest. You may return to work as long as you avoid heavy lifting and activities that move or bounce the breast.

The day after your biopsy

- Do not scrub the wound area or apply ointments to it.
- You may shower 24 hours after the biopsy. Do not soak your breast in water for at least three days. This allows the wound to close before it is exposed to germs that can be in bathwater.
- Return to half of your normal activity, but listen to your body. If you feel discomfort, wait another day or two.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor's office for help with these or any other problems or concerns:

- New or worsening pain or swelling
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fever higher than 100.3° F
- Bleeding

During regular business hours, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call 801-587-4679.

After hours, weekends, or holidays, call 801-587-7000 and ask for the surgical resident on call.