



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Biopsy - biliary tract

URL of this page: [//medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003894.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003894.htm)

Biopsy - biliary tract

A biliary tract biopsy is the removal of small amounts of cells and fluids from the duodenum, bile ducts, pancreas, or pancreatic duct. The sample is examined under a microscope.

How the Test is Performed

A sample for a biliary tract biopsy can be obtained in different ways.

A needle biopsy can be done if you have a well-defined tumor.

- The biopsy site is cleaned.
- A thin needle is inserted into the area to be tested, and a sample of cells and fluid are removed.
- The needle is then removed.
- Pressure is put on the area to stop any bleeding. The site will be covered with a bandage.

If you have a narrowing or blockage of the bile or pancreatic ducts, a sample can be taken during procedures such as:

- Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP)
- Percutaneous transhepatic cholangiogram (PTCA)

How to Prepare for the Test

You may not be able to eat or drink 8 to 12 hours or more before the test. Your health care provider will tell you ahead of time what you need to do.

Make sure you have someone to drive you home.

How the Test will Feel

How the test will feel depends on the type of procedure used to remove the biopsy sample. With a needle biopsy, you may feel a sting as the needle is inserted. Some people feel a cramping or pinching feeling during the procedure.

Medicines that stop pain and help you relax are commonly used for biliary tract biopsy methods.

Why the Test is Performed

A biliary tract biopsy can determine if a tumor started in the liver or spread from another location. It also can determine if the tumor is cancerous.

This test may be done:

- After a physical exam, x-ray, MRI, CT scan, or ultrasound shows abnormal growths in your biliary tract
- To test for diseases or infection

Normal Results

A normal result means there are no signs of cancer, disease, or infection in the biopsy sample.

What Abnormal Results Mean

Abnormal results may be due to:

- Cancer of the bile ducts (cholangiocarcinoma)
- Cysts in the liver
- Liver cancer
- Pancreatic cancer
- Swelling and scarring of the bile ducts (primary sclerosing cholangitis)

Risks

Risks depend on how the biopsy sample was taken.

Risks may include:

- Bleeding at the biopsy site
- Infection

Alternative Names

Cytology analysis - biliary tract; Biliary tract biopsy

References

Chernecky CC, Berger BJ. Biopsy, site-specific-specimen. In: Chernecky CC, Berger BJ, eds. *Laboratory Tests and Diagnostic Procedures*. 6th ed. St Louis, MO: Elsevier Saunders; 2013:199-201.

Gibson RN, Sutherland TR. The biliary system. In: Adam A, Dixon AK, Gillard JH, Schaefer-Prokop CM, eds. *Grainger & Allison's Diagnostic Radiology*. 7th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2021:chap 24.

Wyatt JI, Haugk B. Liver, biliary system and pancreas. In: Cross SS, ed. *Underwood's Pathology*. 7th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2019:chap 16.

Review Date 1/31/2023

Updated by: Michael M. Phillips, MD, Emeritus Professor of Medicine, The George Washington University School of Medicine, Washington, DC. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

Learn how to cite this page



Health Content
Provider
06/01/2028

A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by [URAC](#), for Health Content Provider ([www.urac.org](#)). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#), and [privacy policy](#).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Links to other sites are provided for information only – they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. No warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, is made as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, or correctness of any translations made by a third-party service of the information provided herein into any other language. © 1997-2025 A.D.A.M., a business unit of Ebix, Inc. Any duplication or distribution of the information contained herein is strictly prohibited.

