



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Biopsy

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Biopsy

A biopsy is the removal of a small piece of tissue for lab examination.

How the Test is Performed

There are several different types of biopsies.

A needle biopsy is done using local anesthesia. There are two types.

- Fine needle aspiration uses a small needle attached to a syringe. Very small amounts of tissue cells are removed.
- Core biopsy removes slivers of tissue using a hollow needle attached to a spring-loaded device.

With either type of needle biopsy, the needle is passed several times through the tissue being examined. Your health care provider uses the needle to remove the tissue sample. Needle biopsies are often done using CT scan, MRI, mammogram, or ultrasound. These imaging tools help guide your provider to the right area.

An open biopsy is surgery that uses local or general anesthesia. This means you are relaxed (sedated) or asleep and pain free during the procedure. It is done in a hospital operating room. The surgeon makes a cut into the affected area, and the tissue is removed.

A laparoscopic biopsy uses much smaller surgical cuts than an open biopsy. A camera-like instrument (laparoscope) and tools can be inserted. The laparoscope helps guide the surgeon to the right place to take the sample.

A skin lesion biopsy is done when a small amount of skin is removed so it can be examined. The skin is tested to look for skin conditions or diseases.

How to Prepare for the Test

Before scheduling the biopsy, tell your provider about any medicines you are taking, including herbs and supplements. You may be asked to stop taking some for a while. These include blood thinners such as:

- NSAIDs (aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen)
- Clopidogrel (Plavix)
- Warfarin (Coumadin)
- Dabigatran (Pradaxa)

- Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)
- Apixaban (Eliquis)

Do not stop or change your medicines without first talking to your provider.

How the Test will Feel

With a needle biopsy, you may feel some discomfort at the site of the biopsy. Local anesthesia is injected to lessen the pain that you would feel.

In an open or laparoscopic biopsy, general anesthesia is often used so that you will be pain free.

Why the Test is Performed

A biopsy is most often done to examine tissue for disease.

Normal Results

The tissue removed is normal.

What Abnormal Results Mean

An abnormal biopsy means that the tissue or cells have an unusual structure, shape, size, or condition.

This may mean you have a disease, such as cancer or another condition, but it depends on your biopsy.

Risks

Risks of a biopsy include:

- Bleeding
- Infection

Considerations

There are many different types of biopsies and not all are done with a needle or surgery. Ask your provider for more information about the specific type of biopsy you are having.

Alternative Names

Tissue sampling

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