

Liver Biopsy

Patient Information

What is a liver biopsy?

A liver biopsy is a diagnostic procedure performed to remove a small piece of liver tissue, which can then be examined under the microscope and may help identify certain liver abnormalities. Your referring doctor believes this is of value for your health management.

What happens before the biopsy?

The procedure is performed as a day procedure, which means that you will be admitted to the hospital in the morning of the procedure and you will be discharged the same day, 3 – 6 hours post procedure.

You will need to fast from midnight the night before.

You will need a blood test to check your clotting before the procedure. This should preferably be done within a week of the procedure and can be organised by your referring doctor. If you take blood-thinning medications such as Warfarin, Clopidogrel or heparin these may increase the risk of bleeding and they will need to be stopped for a period of time before this procedure. You will need to see your Doctor to arrange for you to stop these medications and to organise other medications to cover you. You will also need to have a blood test for you clotting times done the day before the procedure to ensure they are normal.,

What should you expect during the procedure?

An initial scan (CT or ultrasound) is performed to find a suitable spot for the biopsy. The skin over the liver is numbed with an injection of local anaesthetic. You will be asked to take a few deep breaths and then hold your breath. While holding your breath the biopsy needle is introduced into the liver and a small piece of tissue is obtained. The procedure may be repeated a couple of times to obtain satisfactory samples. It usually only takes a few minutes to complete the entire procedure. A bandage is then placed over the skin where the needle has entered.

What happens after the biopsy is done?

You will be asked to rest in bed in our facility for up to 4 hours. Your blood pressure will be monitored and the bandage checked. When you go home, you should rest for the remainder of the day, avoid any heavy lifting for up to 48 hours and do not stay on your own overnight. You may return to work the next day

You are not to drive yourself home, organise for someone to stay with you overnight.

Are there any complications?

Complications of liver biopsy are relatively rare. The commonest is pain either at the biopsy site or in the right shoulder. It occurs in up to one in three patients and may last for a couple of days. Simple, non-prescription analgesia such as paracetamol (Panadol) or paracetamol with codeine (Panadeine) can be taken to relieve this minor discomfort if you need pain relief.

The main complication is bleeding. This occurs in about one in 100 cases. Fortunately, such bleeding is minor, is not noticeable to you and will stop without treatment.

Only very rarely (about 1 in 1000 patients) would admission to hospital be required to deal with very severe bleeding resulting from an ultrasound or CT guided liver biopsy. This kind of bleeding is more common if you have a lot of fluid in the abdomen (ascites) or a blood clotting disorder.

Other complications can result from the biopsy needle injuring organs adjacent to your liver such as the right lung, gall bladder or bowel. We use image guidance to ensure that our needle does not enter these structures, making these complications a rare possibility.

When will you get the results?

The results will be available in 4-5 days through your referring doctor.

You should call, attend the Emergency department or see your own doctor if you experience any of the following after the procedure:

- Severe/increasing abdominal or shoulder tip pain
- Faintness
- Shortness of breath
- Oozing of blood from the biopsy site

“Respect, communication, involvement”

The staff in Diagnostic Imaging want to make sure that you have understood the information that we have provided personally, as well as the information contained in the information sheet. We believe your understanding about why and how we are planning to assist you is very important.