

Oral (mouth) biopsy

Department of Maxillofacial Surgery

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of any forthcoming treatment and contains answers to many of the commonly asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask.

What is a biopsy?

A biopsy is a procedure where a small piece of tissue is removed from an area so that it can be looked at closely under a microscope. The biopsy may aim to remove an area completely (an excisional biopsy). This is usually only appropriate for small lumps or swellings. Occasionally only a small piece of an abnormal area is removed to confirm a diagnosis (an incisional biopsy).

How is it done?

In most cases biopsies are carried out under local anaesthesia (an injection into the area to numb it). The injection takes a couple of minutes to work and means that the biopsy will be painless. The biopsy usually leaves a small hole that often requires stitching. In the majority of cases the stitches used are dissolvable and take around two weeks to disappear. The whole process (local anaesthetic injection, biopsy and stitching) usually takes around 20 minutes from start to finish.

Is there much soreness or swelling afterwards?

When the local anaesthetic wears off after a few hours there is likely to be some pain or swelling. It may be necessary to take simple painkillers (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen) for up to a week afterwards.

Will there be much bleeding?

Although there may be a little bleeding at the time of biopsy this usually stops very quickly and is unlikely to be a problem if the wound is stitched. Should the biopsy site bleed again when you get home this can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for at least 20 minutes with a rolled up handkerchief or swab. If the bleeding does not stop please contact the department.

Are there any things I should do when I get home?

Be careful not to bite numb areas of your mouth. On the day of surgery you should avoid rinsing your mouth out vigorously as this may cause bleeding. You should clean your teeth normally, including those teeth next to the site of the biopsy. If you find that food catches around the stitches then the area can be gently rinsed with a mouthwash or warm salt water (dissolve a teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water) commencing on the day after surgery.

When can I return to work?

This largely depends on your job and how you feel after the procedure. Most people are able to return to work later the same day.

Will I need another appointment?

If stitches are put in they are normally dissolvable and can take anything up to two weeks to dissolve. If they are not dissolvable, you will be informed.

The biopsy results can take up to six weeks to be completed. The results of very common lesions can be given over the telephone.

This will be discussed with you on the day of your biopsy and suggested if appropriate. We would need your permission to give the biopsy results over the telephone, of course we would be happy to offer an appointment if you prefer. For the less common lesions we offer a review appointment to discuss the results.

Who do I contact if I have concerns following my procedure?

If you are worried and would like further advice, please do not hesitate to contact us. A doctor is available to deal with your concerns 24 hours a day.

During normal working hours, Monday to Friday 8am until 5pm please telephone the Maxillofacial clinic where your procedure was carried out:

Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton – 01273 696955 Ext. 64067
Princess Royal Hospital, Haywards Heath – 01444 441881 Ext. 68308
Maxillo facial secretaries
for general queries – 01273 696955 Ext. 63695, Ext. 64756

For advice during evenings, weekends and on public holidays, our partner organisation, Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead has a doctor available to assist with any concerns.

Queen Victoria Hospital - 01342 414000 Ext. 6635

Evening hours – Monday to Friday 5pm until 8am

Weekend hours – Friday, 5pm to Monday, 8am

Public holidays – 24 hours cover.

Please ensure you have your patient reference number to hand when you contact us.

This leaflet is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath

© University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust

Disclaimer

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

Ref number: 597.5

Publication Date: May 2021 Review Date: May 2024

