

Bone biopsy

This is an information sheet explaining why you are having a bone biopsy – a test to diagnose bone abnormalities, what it entails and the benefits and risks. If you have any other queries please call the Radiology Department on 0118 322 8368.

Why is a bone biopsy performed?

A bone biopsy is a test used to diagnose the cause of an abnormality in the bone. You will have had a scan already, usually a CT or MRI, which has identified a lesion or appearance that is not fully understood and only by taking a small sample of bone (biopsy) and analysing it under a microscope can its true nature be established. In some cases, the biopsy is critical to guiding any proposed treatment.

How is it performed?

A bone biopsy is performed in the Radiology Department by a doctor called a radiologist. Usually, it is carried out in the CT scanner, a very accurate way of guiding the needle, but in some circumstances ultrasound or X-ray guidance are preferred. This decision is made by the radiologist, when reviewing your previous imaging prior to arranging the biopsy.

The radiologist will talk to you beforehand to explain what your procedure will involve and any related risks. You will then lie in the CT scanner and the area to be biopsied will be cleaned with sterile solution and local anaesthetic administered in the skin and down to the edge of the bone. Depending on the position and type of biopsy, your radiologist may recommend you have a light sedative and strong pain killing injection in addition to the local anaesthetic. If this is the case, a very thin plastic tube (cannula) will be placed into a vein in your hand or arm so the sedative can be given and you will be monitored throughout by nurse.

Once anaesthetised, the radiologist will then pass the needle into the bone and take a very thin core for analysis, sometimes this will be repeated depending on the quality of the sample and the nature of the biopsy.

Is it painful?

The initial anaesthetic needle will sting, but once the anaesthetic has taken effect, the pain is usually minor and bone biopsies are well tolerated by patients. If you find during the procedure that it is painful and you have not been given sedation, the radiologist will stop and arrange for this to be administered.

What are the risks with having a bone biopsy?

A bone biopsy is a generally a low risk procedure. There is a risk of bleeding and infection but this is unusual. In addition, there is a possibility, depending on the site within the body, to damage important structures such as nerves or organs next to the targeted bone. This is minimised by accurate needle position and is rare.

What preparation is required?

Some patients undergoing a bone biopsy have their blood clotting and platelet counts checked beforehand to ensure that they are not at increased risk of bleeding. For this reason, any anticoagulant medications are also stopped or reversed in good time prior to the procedure.

If you are taking any anticoagulant such as warfarin, daily heparin injections or clopidogrel and these have not been discontinued for the biopsy, please contact the Radiology Department on 0118 322 8368. Aspirin can be continued as normal.

We also ask patients to go without food for four hours prior to the procedure and liquids for two hours prior. This enables us to administer sedation safely if required.

What happens afterwards?

- You will be monitored in the Radiology Department recovery unit for approximately one hour. If all is well, you will be discharged into the care of a responsible adult who should spend the next 24 hours with you. You should not drive yourself home afterwards.
- The biopsy site maybe slightly painful afterwards, particularly when the anaesthetic wears off. Simple painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, are usually sufficient to control the pain and can be purchased over the counter.
- Try to keep the dressing dry and untouched for 2 days. After this, we recommend cleaning the wound gently in the shower daily until it is healed. Please avoid taking a bath for five days after the biopsy.

When do I get the results?

The results will take approximately one week and will be sent to the doctor who referred you for the biopsy. Your referring doctor will normally make arrangements to give you the result.

Unfortunately, the Radiology Department cannot give you the result.

Further information

http://www.rcr.ac.uk/docs/patients/worddocs/CRPLG_09.doc

If you require any further information please call the X-ray Department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital 0118 322 8368.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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