



# Skin biopsy (pre biopsy)

Information for patients  
Dermatology Department



## WHAT IS A SKIN BIOPSY?

A skin biopsy is a routine procedure that involves removing a tissue sample such as a lump, a blemish or an abnormal area of skin, so that it can be examined under a microscope. This process helps to confirm the diagnosis of a particular skin condition so that the appropriate treatment can be given.

## THE ANAESTHETIC

This procedure is done under a "local anaesthetic" which will numb the skin and prevent any pain, although you may experience some pulling or pressure. The anaesthetic is usually given by a small injection into and around the area to be biopsied. It can sting briefly and will take effect within a few minutes. The anaesthetic will wear off in 2 - 3 hours. It will not make you feel drowsy or affect your ability to carry out your normal activities afterwards. However, if the biopsy is to be taken from around the eyes or upper face you may experience swelling and bruising. This may make driving impossible so please make arrangements to have somebody there to take you home.

## HOW IS THE BIOPSY TAKEN?

The procedure depends on the type of skin condition that needs to be looked at, some of the common methods are:

- ❖ A Punch biopsy; uses a tool that cuts a small circular plug of skin which is snipped off at the base. This procedure may need a stitch and will heal leaving a small scar.
- ❖ A Curettage/Shave biopsy; is used for skin conditions that are confined to the skin surface where the lesion can be scraped off using a curette or a special blade. This procedure can leave a graze with a resulting scarred area the size of the original lesion.
- ❖ An Incisional biopsy; if the lesion to be removed involves deeper or wider areas, a small wedge of skin and tissue underneath the lesion may be removed with a scalpel and the wound stitched

afterwards. This procedure will leave a linear scar.

- ❖ An Excisional biopsy; is used when conditions such as lumps or pigmented areas need to be removed. The wound is stitched afterwards. This kind of biopsy removes the blemish completely. This procedure will leave a linear scar.

## **AFTER THE BIOPSY**

- ❖ A dressing or bandage may be applied to your wound. It is important to keep it clean and dry after the biopsy.
- ❖ You may have stitches that will need to be removed - the nurse will inform you when and how this will be done.
- ❖ You should avoid strenuous exercise and lifting for 1-2 weeks after the procedure, particularly if you are having an excisional biopsy as the wound may burst or stretch.
- ❖ Pain relief - you may need to use this when the anaesthetic wears off - the nurse or doctor will advise you.
- ❖ Scarring - every biopsy will leave a scar. We will always endeavour to make it as small as possible. Factors such as skin site and skin tension may make the scar more noticeable in some areas such as over joints. Scars on the chest and back can be prone to stretching and sometimes over healing producing a lump (also known as a hypertrophic or keloid scar). There may also be redness associated with the scar which may take several months to disappear.
- ❖ Dehiscence/Wound bursting - rarely after the stitches are taken out or if there has been some infection, the wound may burst open. Stitches are not normally reapplied and the wound will heal itself provided it is kept dry, clean and covered with a clean dressing. The wound will take a bit longer to heal and may leave you with a slightly bigger scar. Sometimes it will be necessary for you to attend your practice nurse regularly to ensure the wound is healing properly and to have it re-dressed.

- ❖ Results - the results of the biopsy may take at least 6 weeks to come through and the results will be forwarded to your own doctor. You should check the result with your GP if you have not been given a follow-up appointment with the Dermatology Department.
- ❖ Healing - not every biopsy heals perfectly. Infection is uncommon, but may occur even with the best surgical facilities and techniques. If the skin around the wound becomes red, hot, painful or starts to weep contact your GP.

If you have any questions/queries regarding your appointment please call us at the numbers listed below:

### **University Hospital Hairmyres**

East Kilbride G75 8RG  
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### **University Hospital Monklands**

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