Ultrasound guided liver biopsy

Information for patients

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

Your doctor has advised you should have an ultrasound guided liver biopsy.

This leaflet tells you about an ultrasound guided liver biopsy, how to prepare for it and what will happen during and after the procedure.

What is a liver biopsy?

A liver biopsy is a procedure where a small sample of your liver tissue is taken and sent to a laboratory for testing.

Why do I need a liver biopsy?

A liver biopsy can give detailed information which will help your doctor find out if you have a condition affecting your liver, for example, inflammation, liver damage, a cancerous or non-cancerous tumour (growth).

What is ultrasound?

Ultrasound is a painless examination using sound waves to make pictures of the inside of your body. These are shown on a monitor attached to the ultrasound machine.

Is ultrasound safe?

Yes, ultrasound is safe and no radiation (x-rays) is used.¹

Who will do my biopsy?

Your biopsy will be done by a radiologist (a doctor who specialises in x-ray, ultrasound and other similar types of examinations and reports on the findings). The results are sent to your consultant.

What will happen before my biopsy?

You will need to have a blood test a few days before the procedure to check how your blood clots. This can be done at your GP surgery, your hospital outpatient or pre-assessment appointment.
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A few days before your biopsy you may be asked to attend a pre-assessment appointment. You will be seen by a specialist nurse who will explain about your biopsy, what to expect when you are admitted to hospital and answer any questions you may have.

You will be asked questions about your health. It is important you tell your nurse about any problems you may have, for example, high blood pressure or angina. He or she will also make sure you have arranged for a responsible adult to stay with you overnight after your biopsy.

You will usually be admitted as a day case patient unless you are already an inpatient. If you are a day case patient you will usually be able to go home about 6 hours after your biopsy. There must be a responsible adult to take you home and stay with you overnight after your biopsy. If you have not made these arrangements you will need to stay in hospital overnight.

What will I have to do to prepare for my ultrasound biopsy?

If you are taking any medication which affects how your blood clots, for example, if you are taking:

- Warfarin, Acenocoumoral, Rivaroxaban, Dabigatran, Clopidogrel your doctor or specialist nurse will advise you on when to stop taking them.
- Tinzaparin you must omit (stop taking) this the day before your procedure. You should start taking your Tinzaparin again the day after your procedure.
- Aspirin. You must stop taking this 5 days before your biopsy.

You must stop eating from midnight the day before but you should continue to take clear fluids with your other medication.

If you have diabetes, you must contact the diabetic liaison nurses for advice about taking your insulin or tablets for diabetes. (See contact numbers at the back of this leaflet.)

What will happen when I arrive for my appointment?

If you are not already an inpatient, you will be sent an appointment letter telling you when and where to come. When you arrive at the Day Case Unit or ward, you will be told what time you should be ready to go home. Anyone wishing to stay will be told where they can wait. There is limited space, so only in special cases will anyone be allowed to stay with you, for example, parents with children, or adults with special needs. You will be asked for a telephone number of the relative or friend who will take you home after your biopsy.
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For all patients, when it is time for your procedure you will be taken to the x-ray department. A member of staff will call you through to the x-ray room; check your personal details, blood pressure and pulse. Your radiologist will explain the procedure again and discuss the risks and possible complications. This is just to make sure you understand everything before you sign the consent form. If you have any worries or questions, please talk to your radiologist.

What are the risks and possible complications?

The most common risks and possible complications include:

- **pain.** About 30 patients in every 100 suffer pain in their right shoulder, chest, upper abdomen (tummy) or where the needle was inserted.²

- **bleeding.** This can happen to 1 patient in every 300 after this procedure.³ Your blood clotting levels will be tested before your biopsy to check your risk of bleeding. If your blood is not clotting normally you will be given treatment to correct this before your biopsy.

- **puncture of other organs,** for example, lung, kidney, gall bladder or colon (bowel). This can happen to 1 patient in every 1,000 – 10,000.³ If this happens you may need a longer stay in hospital.

- **death.** This is very rare.²

What will happen during my liver biopsy?

You will be asked to lie down on your back on a trolley, with your right arm under your head. Part of your chest will be bared but the rest of your body will be kept covered. A member of staff will stay with you during your biopsy and make sure you are comfortable.

Gel will be spread onto your skin. The gel is needed for the scan as it allows the ultrasound probe to move smoothly over your skin. The gel may wet your clothes but it will not stain them. You might prefer to wear older casual clothes or you can ask the staff for a hospital gown.

The lights in the examination room will be dimmed and the radiologist will move the probe over your skin while looking at the pictures on a monitor to find the area of your liver from where the biopsy needs to be taken. He or she will be concentrating on the scan so may not talk to you. Do not be worried by this.

The area of skin over your liver will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution to reduce the risk of infection. Your radiologist will then give you an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the area; this will sting. When the area is numb he or she will make a small incision (cut) in your skin to make it easier to insert the special biopsy needle, using the ultrasound scan picture as a guide.
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You will be asked to take some deep breaths in and out. Your radiologist will tell you to hold your breath so your liver does not move while the biopsy is being taken. While you are holding your breath the biopsy needle will be quickly inserted between your ribs into your liver and removed immediately. A dressing will be placed over the small wound.

The procedure may need to be repeated if the sample taken is too small.

Will it be painful?

Most patients do not find the procedure painful, but you may feel some slight discomfort. Some patients feel a sharp pain as the biopsy is taken.

What will happen after the procedure?

You will be taken to either a ward or Day Case Unit where you will have to say in bed and rest for 4 hours. During this time you must not get out of bed. You will be given the nurse call buzzer to use if needed.

Your blood pressure, pulse and temperature will be checked regularly. If you have any pain, tell one of your nurses.

You will be offered a light meal 2 – 4 hours after your biopsy.

If you develop any complications you may need a longer stay in hospital.

When will I be able to go home?

If you were admitted as a day case patient and there are no complications you will be able to go home later the same day.

A responsible adult must:

- take you home.
- stay with you overnight in case you develop any complications.
- be able to bring you back to hospital, if needed.

If you are an inpatient your doctor will discuss with you when you can go home.

How will I feel when I go home?

You may have some soreness or discomfort for 2 – 3 days after your biopsy. If needed, you can take painkillers, for example, Paracetamol. You should always follow the instructions provided in the leaflet supplied with your tablets.
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What should I do when I go home?

You should:
- relax quietly at home for the rest of the day.
- have light meals.
- take any medications as normal unless your doctor has advised otherwise.
- not lift heavy objects for 10 days after your biopsy.
- not play contact sports, for example, football or judo, for 10 days after your biopsy.
- remove the dressing over your biopsy site after 2 days.

If you have any problems during the night after your biopsy you must contact your local Accident and Emergency Department for advice (see contact numbers at the end of this leaflet).

When will I be told the results of my liver biopsy?

The tissue samples taken will be sent to a laboratory for further examination; the results of these tests may not be known for up to 6 weeks. You will be sent an outpatient appointment through the post. Your doctor will discuss your results with you during this appointment.

Your GP will also be sent a copy of these results.

Contact numbers

If you need further advice, or have any problems, please contact 01642 617617 and ask switchboard for the person who referred you for the biopsy.

University Hospital of North Tees

Diabetic Liaison Nurse
telephone: 01642 624618
Monday – Friday, 9.00am – 5.00pm

Accident and Emergency Department
telephone: 01642 382899
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Further information is available from:

NHS Choices
telephone: 111 (when it is less urgent than 999)
Calls to this number are free from landlines and mobile phones
or via the website at www.nhs.uk
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References


This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk.

Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we’re doing well or if there’s anything which we can improve, that’s why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

    telephone: 01642 624719
    Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 4.00 pm
    Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

    freephone: 0800 092 0084
    Mobile: (can use text): 0779 506 1883
    Email: patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

    telephone: 01642 617617
    24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm.

Data Protection and use of patient information

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Head of Communications.

    telephone: 01642 624339 or www.gov.uk/data-protection

University Hospital of North Tees, Hardwick, Stockton-on-Tees. TS19 8PE
University Hospital of Hartlepool, Holdforth Road, Hartlepool. TS24 9AH

Telephone: 01642 617617    Fax: 01642 624089