

Facts About Breast Biopsy

What is a breast biopsy?

A breast biopsy is a diagnostic test of the tissue (and sometimes fluid) from a suspicious area in your breast. After tissue samples are taken, a pathologist will examine the cells under a microscope to check for breast cancer.

Why do I need a breast biopsy?

A biopsy is the best way to find out if you have breast cancer. It is done if your health care provider finds a lump or other suspicious area in your breast during a physical exam, mammogram, ultrasound or MRI.

How is a breast biopsy done?

There are three general types of breast biopsies: fine needle aspiration, core needle biopsy, and surgical biopsy. Your provider will consider many different factors before choosing the best biopsy option for you.

 **The good news is that 80% of women who have a breast biopsy do not have breast cancer.** 

Three Steps to Healthy Breasts

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women in the United States. When found early, there are many life-saving treatments. Over 90% of breast cancers can be detected by following a simple three-step program:

Step 1 Monthly Breast Self-Exam (BSE)

- Starting in your 20s, check your breasts for changes, lumps or abnormalities.
- You can do a self-exam in the shower, looking in a mirror, or lying down.
- If you notice any changes in your breasts, call your health care provider right away.
- Learn how to do a BSE online at www.nationalbreastcancer.org/breast-self-exam.

Step 2 Clinical Breast Exam (CBE)

- A physical breast exam done by a qualified health provider.
- If you are in your 20s or 30s you should have an exam every three years.
- If you are age 40 or older you should have an exam every year.

Step 3 Mammography

A mammogram is the best breast cancer screening test for most women. If you are at average risk for breast cancer (13% over your lifetime), the American Cancer Society recommends:

- **At age 40-44.** You can choose to start having a yearly mammogram.
- **At age 45-54.** You should have a mammogram every year.
- **At age 55 and older.** You can choose to have a mammogram every year or every other year.

If you're at **high risk** (20% or higher), your health care provider will want you to begin screening at an earlier age. Because younger women can have denser breast tissue, an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) breast screening may also be recommended.

Ultrasound-Guided Breast Biopsy

A Quick Guide to Smart Breast Health



What is an Ultrasound-Guided Breast Biopsy?

An ultrasound-guided breast biopsy uses an ultrasound probe and sound waves instead of x-rays to create dimensional images of your breast. Once the lump or suspicious area is visible on the computer screen, the radiologist will use a special needle to remove samples of your breast tissue for further testing.

Advantages of this type of biopsy:

- Done when a suspicious area can be seen on an ultrasound image, but no lump is felt.
- Can evaluate a lump (under the arm or near the chest wall) that is difficult to assess by stereotactic biopsy.
- Is much faster and less damaging to breast tissue than an excisional (open) biopsy.

 The terms **ultrasound** and **sonogram** refer to the same technology. 

What to Expect

You don't need to do any special preparation before coming in. Dress comfortably in a two-piece outfit—you'll have to undress above the waist. Don't use any type of powder, deodorant, ointment or cream near your breasts. The test usually takes 30-60 minutes.

How the Test is Done

You'll be lying face up or turned slightly to the side on an exam table. Here's what happens next:

- A specially-trained radiologist or technologist moves a hand-held scanner (wand) over your breast to pinpoint the area to be biopsied. The ultrasound machine captures images of your breast on a computer screen to show the radiologist the exact location of the suspicious area of your breast.
- A local anesthetic is injected into your skin and breast to help numb any pain.
- Once your breast is numbed, the radiologist makes a small (about 1/4") incision into your breast, then inserts a needle or other small instrument to remove several tissue samples.
- A tiny tissue marker (clip) may be inserted into the breast at the area of the biopsy.
- A simple dressing will be placed over the incision site. Pressure will be applied to the area for about 10 minutes to make sure any bleeding has stopped.
- A mammogram image of your breast may be taken to document the area of biopsy.

After Your Biopsy

Most women have little or no pain during the biopsy and no scarring afterward. If you do have some discomfort, an ice pack and pain-killing medication can help.

Although complications are rare, call your doctor right away if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Prolonged bleeding or a foul odor
- Unusual discharge or drainage
- Firmness, redness or warmth around the site
- A fever of 100°F or higher

Test Results

A pathologist will examine the tissue samples from your breast under a microscope for signs of breast cancer. Results are usually sent to your health care provider in 3-5 days.

A biopsy is the only diagnostic test that can determine if a suspicious area in your breast is breast cancer.

