

Liver Biopsy Information

Radiology

Patient Information Leaflet

Information for patients having a liver biopsy

What is a liver biopsy?

A liver biopsy involves taking a small sample of liver tissue. A pathologist will view it under a microscope to make a specific diagnosis. It is vital information for determining treatment.

Preparation

Before going ahead, we first carry out some simple blood tests to ensure that there is not an increased risk of bleeding after the biopsy.

You will be advised to stop taking any medications that might cause an increased risk of bleeding (for example Aspirin, Clopidogrel, or Warfarin). You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the procedure.

How is it performed?

The liver biopsy is usually performed on an outpatient basis. The patient lies on their back or slightly to the left. The radiologist will perform an ultrasound scan to find a suitable site for the biopsy and make sure it is safe to proceed.

The skin is cleaned and local anaesthetic is used to numb the skin and tissue underneath. A specially designed thin needle is inserted. The needle is inserted into and out of the liver; this takes only a few seconds. A slender core of tissue is removed. The biopsy is performed with an ultrasound scan to guide the biopsy needle, so as to minimise the risk of complications.

What are the possible complications?

In most cases, a liver biopsy is obtained quickly with no problems. There is often discomfort in the right side or shoulder which is usually minor but can occasionally be more severe. Internal bleeding can sometimes occur, the risk of significant bleeding is less than 0.5%. There is also a very small risk of a leak of bile from the liver or gallbladder.

What are the possible complications?

These problems are uncommon but can sometimes require hospital admission for a longer period of observation. Rarely, it may be necessary to perform a surgical operation to control internal bleeding caused by the biopsy. A large audit of liver biopsies performed in the United Kingdom indicated that there is a risk of about 1 in 1000 of death from complications of a liver biopsy.

What will happen afterwards?

You will be closely observed on the ward or in the Radiology Day Care unit and nurses will regularly check your blood pressure and other nursing observations. You will be expected

to lie in bed for 4-6 hours. If you remain well after this time you will be discharged, providing there will be somebody at home to take care of you overnight.

What happens when I get home?

You should rest for the first 24 hours and refrain from driving, exercise, heavy lifting etc. You should stay off work for 48 hours. If you feel light-headed or have difficulty breathing or worsening pain/tenderness at the site of the biopsy, you should return to the nearest hospital emergency department.

How and when will I get the results?

It takes up to or sometimes more than 7 days for the results to be processed. You should be given the results by the referring doctor. If you haven't heard anything within 2 weeks of having the biopsy, you should contact the referring doctor via the hospital switchboard (01524 65944).

Leaflet Details

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Useful Contact Details

NHS 111 (for 24 hour urgent health advice): telephone 111

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Evidence

Details of the evidence used in writing this leaflet are available on request from: Patient Information Officer at 01524 512476.

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment, please speak to a member of staff or contact PALS on 01539 795497.

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