

# Vulval Biopsy / Vulval Surgery

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## Gynaecology

### **What is the vulva?**

The vulva is the outer, visible part of the genitalia.

It includes the clitoris, the labia (the outer and inner lips that surround the vagina), and the urethral (urinary) openings.

### **What is the difference between a biopsy and surgery?**

A vulval biopsy is a small skin sample about the size of a peppercorn. They are taken to help diagnose skin conditions.

Vulval surgery includes treatment for Bartholin's cysts, removal of skin tags or warts, refashioning (or 'tidying-up') episiotomy scars (following childbirth) or Fentons procedure (widening of the opening of the vagina, which may have become narrow due to scar tissue or hormonal changes).

### **What happens during a vulval biopsy?**

A biopsy is often taken in the clinic after a local anaesthetic injection. A dissolvable stitch may be needed.

It takes approximately five minutes.

### **Are there any risks?**

These are rare and seldom serious. They will be discussed with you by your doctor depending on your type of procedure.

### **What happens during a vulval operation?**

These operations can be done using a general anaesthetic (where you are asleep), a spinal anaesthetic (where you are awake but numb from the waist down), or a local anaesthetic where just the operation site is numbed by an injection.

This will be discussed with you by your anaesthetist (doctor).

You and your gynaecologist will discuss exactly what your procedure will involve beforehand.

You are likely to have some stitches that will dissolve on their own.

## **How long does it take?**

The operation takes about half an hour.

## **Contraception and HRT**

Keep using your usual contraception or HRT until you have the operation. You do not have to stop the contraceptive pill or have a coil removed before this type of operation.

## **What happens after the procedure?**

You will be able to eat and drink very soon after the procedure. We will offer you painkillers if you need them.

There may be some discomfort, bruising and swelling around the site of your biopsy / surgery.

This is normal and may take about a week to settle.

The local anaesthetic used often numbs the area and lasts for a few hours after your procedure, wearing off gradually.

There may be a little bleeding after your operation and you should bring some sanitary pads into hospital with you.

## **When can I go home?**

If you had a local anaesthetic you can expect to go home either straight from the clinic or if you have been to the operating theatre in approximately 1 hour.

You can drive yourself home if you feel well.

If you had a general anaesthetic you will probably need to stay in bed for a couple of hours after the operation. Most women are able to go home the same day.

## **What if I need a general anaesthetic?**

For 24 hours after general anaesthetic you are strongly advised:

- Not to drink alcohol

- Not to use any drugs unless advised by your doctor or hospital
- Not to drive or cycle
- Not to operate machinery, including kitchen equipment
- Not to sign any legal documents or make important decisions
- Not to smoke
- You must make arrangements for an escort home. A responsible adult must stay with you for 24 hours after your general anaesthetic.

## **How quickly will I get back to normal?**

You can have a bath or shower 24 hours after the procedure but do not use a bubble bath. You may find it soothing to have a shower twice daily.

You may have some mild pain for one or two days. Many women find it helpful to take paracetamol and ibuprofen (unless you have an allergy to these). It is a good idea for you to have some of these at home as the hospital does not provide them. Always follow the dosage instructions on the bottle or packet.

Washing the vulval area with water after going to the toilet can help if the area stings.

You may have light bleeding for a few days. You should get steadily better each day. If you find that you have pain which is getting worse, fever, or diarrhoea and sickness it is important that you contact your GP to rule out complications from the procedure.

You may need between three to five days off work and strenuous exercise after your surgery, depending on your job and how comfortable you are. Please ask for a medical certificate if you think you will need one.

Refrain from sexual intercourse until any bleeding or discharge has completely settled or you are comfortable. This may take up to four weeks, especially if you have stitches. You may find using a lubricant jelly helpful initially.

Bleeding: if you have a lot of bleeding which cannot be controlled by applying pressure to the area for about 15 minutes please contact the Gynaecology ward.

## **What about my results?**

Your doctor will explain what the procedure showed before you go home. He or she may recommend further treatment from your GP or arrange another hospital appointment for you.

When a sample has been sent to the laboratory the surgeon will discuss whether you need to come back to the hospital for the results or whether he / she can simply write to you and your GP. It can take three weeks or more before the doctor receives the laboratory results and then a week or so before the letter will reach you and your GP.

This leaflet contains general information. Please discuss any questions you have about your operation with your doctor.

## Leaflet Details

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## **Other formats**

If you would like to receive this information in an alternative format, then please contact: 01539 715577.

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For the best way to plan your journey visit our website: <http://www.UHMB.nhs.uk/> or contact Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS): 01539 715577.

## **Useful Contact Details**

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

## **Your Information**

If you would like to know how we use, share, disclose and secure your information and your rights of access to the information we hold about you, visit the Trust's website: <http://www.UHMB.nhs.uk/> or contact Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01539 715577.

## **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 715577.

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NHS Quit Squad - **0800 328 6297**

If you live in Cumbria, please call **0300 013 3000** to find a local pharmacy who are offers 1-2-1 support and nicotine replacement therapy.

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