



LIVER BIOPSY

Patient Information

What is “liver biopsy”?

Liver biopsy uses a needle to obtain a small sample of liver tissue which can be processed and examined under a microscope. It is frequently the only means of precisely diagnosing a variety of liver conditions.

Your doctor will usually recommend liver biopsy only after a variety of other tests have failed to make a precise diagnosis.

Liver biopsy may also be necessary to assess the progress of certain liver disorders.

How are you prepared?

There are different types of liver biopsy, for some you must have your blood clotting ability tested before the biopsy is carried out. In other cases this is not essential. You should not take blood thinning tablets, aspirin or arthritis tablets in the week before the biopsy.

Preparation:

You must not have anything to eat or drink except for sips of water for 6 hours prior to your examination.

After you are admitted to the hospital, you will be required to empty your bladder and change into a theatre gown. You will then have an IV cannula (a small tube) placed in your arm to allow administration of IV sedation and be brought down to Radiology.

What do we do?

You will probably be given intravenous sedation medicine at the start of the procedure so you will feel calm and relaxed. The biopsy itself involves preparing the skin over the upper abdomen on the right side with an antiseptic solution. A local anaesthetic is then injected. The skin should become numb in a few seconds. Subsequently, a liver biopsy needle is passed into the liver, through the numb area, so you will not feel it.

As the local anaesthetic wears off, you may feel discomfort in the right side of the abdomen or on the upper aspect of the right shoulder. Pain killers will be given if you need it.

Safety and risks

Liver biopsy is a safe procedure with low risks, but all medical procedures have risks. Complications of liver biopsy can include bleeding into the abdominal cavity from the puncture site. Usually, such bleeding will stop without intervention, occasionally blood transfusion will be required. Extremely rarely, operation may be necessary to stop the bleeding.

Other complications include damage to other organs, such as the right lung, gallbladder or bowel.