

Biopsy

What Is A Biopsy?

A biopsy is a medical test that allows your doctor to remove a small amount of tissue from your body. The tissue is then sent to a laboratory where it is examined for signs of disease or cancer. It is usually done to help diagnose a medical problem or to help your doctor determine the best treatment for your medical condition.

Most biopsies of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract are performed at a hospital or outpatient surgery center and are done as part of another procedure, such as a colonoscopy or upper endoscopy.

Why Do I Need A Biopsy?

Your doctor may take a biopsy as part of an evaluation for symptoms you are having, such as persistent abdominal pain, difficulty swallowing, or bowel changes. The biopsy can be an important part of your medical evaluation. Some conditions that a biopsy can help diagnose include Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, gastritis, celiac disease, infection, or autoimmune disorders.

A biopsy is also necessary for diagnosing any abnormal areas that are seen during a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy, done as part of routine colon cancer screening. It has an especially important role in diagnosing pre-cancers and cancer.

Any tissue that is collected during a biopsy is sent to a laboratory for testing. The results are then sent to your doctor, who uses the information to decide if you have a specific medical condition.

A biopsy result can also be normal. In this case, it helps your doctor rule out a number of different problems and can be just as useful as an abnormal biopsy result.

How Is A Biopsy Taken?

The type of procedure you need for your biopsy depends upon the location of the tissue that needs to be tested.

Biopsies of the esophagus, stomach, and upper intestine (duodenum) are taken during an upper endoscopy. This involves inserting a long, narrow tube with a light and tiny camera attached to it (endoscope), through your mouth and into the area that needs to be studied. Small surgical tools can be inserted through the endoscope and used to take the biopsy.

The endoscope can also be used to take a biopsy of your bile ducts or pancreatic ducts during an ERCP. This procedure allows for the endoscope to be inserted through a small opening in the duodenum, called the main duct, in order to take a biopsy.

A colonoscopy allows your doctor to visualize and biopsy areas inside the rectum and the entire length of your colon, while a sigmoidoscopy allows your doctor to visualize and biopsy areas in the rectum and lower colon. Both of these



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procedures involve inserting a flexible, narrow tube with a light and tiny camera attached to it (colonoscope), through your anus and into the rectum or colon. Small surgical tools can be inserted through the colonoscope and used to take the biopsy.

In general, biopsies are not painful and do not require additional medication beyond what you are already receiving for your GI procedure.

How Do I Prepare For A Biopsy?

Preparation for a biopsy will depend upon which procedure you need to have done to collect the biopsy. You may be asked to completely clean out your colon with a bowel preparation, drink only a clear liquid diet the day before the test, or stop eating and drinking anything 6 to 8 hours before your test. Your doctor will give you specific instructions to follow.

While most medications are safe to take before your test, you may be asked to stop taking certain medications. In order for your doctor to decide if any of your medications need to be stopped, it is essential that you let them know all of the medications you are taking, including supplements and herbal remedies.

If you will be having sedation as part of your procedure, you will not be able to drive yourself home. So it is important to bring someone with you to the outpatient center or hospital.

How Long Will It Take To Get The Biopsy Results?

After your biopsy is taken, the tissue is sent to the laboratory for testing. It can take a few days or more before the results of your biopsy are available, depending on the type of testing that is needed.

Once your doctor has had a chance to review the results, they may call you to discuss the results or ask you to schedule an appointment to discuss what needs to be done next.

What Are The Risks Of A Biopsy?

A biopsy is a safe procedure and serious complications are rare. The most common risks are infection or bleeding.

Where Can You Get More Information About A Biopsy?

- **National Health Service**
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Biopsy/Pages/How-it-is-performed.aspx>
- **U.S. National Library of Medicine**
<https://medlineplus.gov/biopsy.html>