Stereotactic Breast Biopsy

Your doctor has recommended you for a stereotactic breast biopsy to collect a small sample of tissue to be analyzed. Rest assured, having a biopsy doesn't mean you have breast cancer and more than 80 percent of breast biopsies are benign (non-cancerous).

Advantages of the stereotactic breast biopsy procedure

- Simple, safe and painless
- One-third the cost of an open surgical biopsy
- Local anesthesia only
- Takes less than an hour in a comfortable outpatient setting
- No stitches needed
- Several samples taken without removing and re-inserting the needle
- Highly accurate diagnosis
- Quick recovery time

How to prepare

- Make sure your doctor is aware of all medications you take, including herbal supplements. You will most likely need to stop taking aspirin, Motrin or other blood thinners at least three days before the procedure.
- Inform your doctor the day of the procedure of any recent illnesses or other medical conditions, and if there is any possibility you are pregnant.
- Do not wear deodorant, powder, lotion or perfume the day of the procedure.
- Wear a comfortable two-piece outfit. Wear or bring a firm support bra or sports bra.
- Be prepared to remove jewelry, dental appliances, eye glasses, and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the x-ray images.
- Bring a relative or friend to drive you home afterward, especially if you are given any sedation.

What to expect

During the procedure

- You will be comfortably positioned face down on a special stereotactic table. Your breast will be placed through an opening in the table and it will be slightly compressed.
- The suspicious site will be located via digital stereotactic x-ray.
- After the area is cleaned and numbed, the biopsy needle is aimed at the site with computer guidance and placed in the center of the tissue to be examined. As samples are taken, you may hear clicks from the sampling instrument.
• A small marker may be placed at the site so it can be located again in the future if necessary. A mammogram will be done after the procedure to confirm the marker is in the proper position.
• You will be awake during your biopsy and should have minimal discomfort. Most women report little or no pain, and no scarring.

After the procedure
• Pressure will be applied to your breast for a few minutes.
• The skin nick will not require stitches - a small steri-strip and dressing will be placed over the site. While the dressing is on keep the area dry to avoid infection.
• For the first six to eight hours after the procedure you may insert an ice pack in your bra to help relieve pain and reduce swelling or bruising.
• You may take a non-aspirin pain reliever, like Tylenol, to help alleviate discomfort. There may be some bruising, which should resolve within five to seven days.
• Although normal activities can be resumed after the exam, avoid heavy lifting and strenuous activities. No swimming or hot tubs for a week.
• You may find it helpful to wear a bra to maintain pressure on the biopsy site.
• Contact your physician if you experience excessive swelling, bleeding, drainage, redness or heat in the breast.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a stereotactic breast biopsy?
It is a non-surgical way to obtain a tissue sample. The procedure is state-of-the-art and provides early, accurate results. Two digital x-ray images of breast tissue are taken at different angles. A computer uses the images to locate the abnormality and calculate precise coordinates. The computer then guides the physician in placing the needle at the correct target area.

How is this different from other biopsy procedures?
This procedure is less invasive and less painful compared to other methods. It takes far less time to perform this nonsurgical technique and you’ll be back to normal activity the same day.

How long does the procedure take?
Typically, it takes approximately 60 minutes from the time you enter the exam room to the time you leave. The actual biopsy procedure takes a very short amount of time. After the biopsy, a final set of images may be taken and your physician may place a marker at the site for future reference. The marker is made of titanium and poses no health or safety risk. You will not notice the marker after placement.

Is the procedure painful?
You might feel a slight sting or pinch when the numbing medication is inserted into the breast. Numbing the breast prior to the biopsy causes the rest of the procedure to be pain free.

Are there any side effects?
The treatment is generally free of side effects. In some cases, “black and blue” discoloration may occur in the region of the biopsy. Every such operation involves a minimal risk of infection.