

Patient information factsheet

Vulval biopsy

We have given you this factsheet because your doctor has recommended that you have a vulval biopsy. It explains what a vulval biopsy is, why it has been recommended for you, and what to expect during and after the procedure. We hope it will answer some of your questions. If you have any further questions, please speak to a member of the team using the contact details at the end of the factsheet.

What is a vulval biopsy?

The vulva is a woman's external genitals. It includes:

- the lips surrounding the vagina (labia minora and labia majora)
- the clitoris (the sexual organ that helps women reach sexual climax)
- the Bartholin's glands (two small glands on either side of the vagina)

A vulval biopsy is when a small piece of tissue from the vulval skin is removed. This is sent to the laboratory for testing. This can help us to make a diagnosis.

You may have been referred for a vulval biopsy if you have:

- vulval pain
- vulval itching
- an ulcer on your vulva
- a lump on your vulva
- blisters on your vulva
- a rash on your vulva

What happens during a vulval biopsy?

There is no specific preparation needed before a vulval biopsy.

When you arrive for the biopsy, we will give you an injection of local anaesthetic into the part of the vulva we will biopsy. This will numb the area. The injection will sting, but the doctor will make sure that the area is numb before they begin the biopsy.

Despite the area being numb, some people might find it uncomfortable to have a biopsy with a local anaesthetic. If this is the case for you, we will arrange for you to have biopsy under general anaesthetic (you will be asleep for the procedure) at a later date.

We may need to close the opening of the biopsy with one or more stitches. The type of stitches we use are dissolvable and fall out by themselves, usually between seven and 10 days after the biopsy (although this can vary).

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Occasionally, we can close the opening of the biopsy using silver nitrate (a chemical used to seal the area). It does not require stitches.

You should not feel any pain when the biopsy area is closed, as the local anaesthetic injection should still be working. However, you may have a discoloured discharge for a day or two.

After the biopsy

You can go home immediately after the biopsy procedure.

The local anaesthetic usually wears off after about an hour. It is normal for the area to feel tender for a few days afterwards. You may feel more comfortable if you take painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Hygiene

You should:

- wash the area in a lukewarm bath or shower each day
- gently pat the area dry with a clean towel
- gently rinse the area with lukewarm water and pat dry after using the toilet

You should **not**:

- soak in the bath
- use scented soap, shower gel or bath foam while the area heals

You may notice a small amount of bleeding or yellow discharge from the area of the biopsy. This is normal, and you can use a sanitary pad to absorb this. Remember to change your pads regularly to prevent infection.

Intimacy and exercise

You can have sexual intercourse three or four days after the biopsy has been taken, as long as the area is fully comfortable.

Vigorous exercise such as running, cycling and horse riding should be avoided for a few days after the biopsy. This is because the area is likely to be uncomfortable and the biopsy site will be fragile.

You can start swimming again after the stitches have dissolved or after the biopsy site has healed fully.

If you have any questions about exercising, please ask the doctor performing your biopsy.

Side effects

You should contact your GP or call the colposcopy department if:

- you have red and painful skin around the vulva
- you have a temperature of above 38°C
- the bleeding increases
- the discharge becomes smelly or changes colour

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Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Gynaecology pathway navigator (for queries regarding urgent referrals only)

Telephone: **07787 008 205** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm)

Colposcopy and hysteroscopy department

Telephone: **023 8120 6034** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4pm)

Bramshaw Women's Unit

Telephone: **023 8120 6035** (evenings and weekends)

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/Biopsy

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport