

# Skin biopsy fact sheet

A small sample of skin is taken from the area showing symptoms or changes.

## Quick facts

- A biopsy can be used to help a doctor work out what is causing symptoms or changes to the skin
- Skin biopsies in the genital area usually heal very well

## What is this?

A biopsy is sometimes used to help with diagnosis. The doctor will remove a small sample of skin from the area showing symptoms or changes. A pathologist will examine this sample under a microscope. In most cases an accurate diagnosis can be made. If not, there is usually enough information to guide treatment.

## Is it painful?

Before the biopsy is taken, the doctor will numb the skin by injecting a small amount of local anaesthetic. There is an initial sting that goes away quickly. After this, the procedure is pain free. The numbing will last about an hour.

## After the biopsy

The site of the biopsy will bleed a little. The site of the biopsy might bleed a little, and leave a black scab. The scab will fall off in a few days. Sometimes a small, dissolving skin stitch is used. This stitch usually falls out by itself within 2 weeks. The biopsy leaves a small pit in the skin, like an ulcer, which normally heals quickly within 1 - 2 weeks.

Six weeks after the biopsy, it can be hard to see where the biopsy was taken.

## Care of the skin

Skin biopsies in the genital area usually heal very well with out any problems.

Salt water baths or soaks help with healing, are soothing and reduce risk of infection. To prepare a salt bath:

- add a fistful of salt to a shallow bath and soak, or
- mix 1 level teaspoon of salt into 1 litre of water, soak a washcloth and apply to genital skin for 10-15 minutes
- pat genital skin dry
- repeat 2-3 times a day for 5-7 days

Topical local anaesthetic (2% xylocaine gel) can reduce discomfort in the first few days after the biopsy. The gel can be used as often as needed, and is especially helpful if there is pain with toileting (apply 10 minutes beforehand). It does sting for a short while after applying.

Your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic ointment to reduce the risk of infection at the biopsy site.

## Sexual activity

After a skin biopsy, you can start sexual activity once the area is comfortable to touch.

### Disclaimer

This fact sheet provides general sexual health information and is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. If you have concerns about your health, you should seek advice from your doctor.

If you need urgent care, go to your nearest Emergency Department or call-000.