

What is a biopsy?

A biopsy is a surgical procedure to remove a small piece of tissue from an affected area inside the mouth, so that it can be looked at closely under a microscope.

There are two types of biopsy:

excision biopsy – where the biopsy aims to remove an area completely. This is usually only appropriate for small lumps or swellings.

incision biopsy – where only a small piece of tissue is removed to confirm a diagnosis.

How is it done?

It has been decided that your biopsy needs to be performed under general anaesthetic as some areas of the mouth are difficult to see and reach under local anaesthetic. This means that you will be asleep during your procedure.

We should already have advised you of the importance of having someone stay with you for the first 24 hours after your procedure. Judgement and responses are affected and you may feel light-headed or nauseous.

For at least 24hours (1 full day), preferably 48hours (2 full days) you must not drive, look after children alone, use machinery or power tools, drink alcohol or sign legal documents.

The biopsy will leave a small wound that usually requires stitching. In the majority of cases, the stitches used are dissolvable and may take up to two weeks to disappear.

Sometimes an electrical current is used to stop the bleeding and the area is left to heal on its own.

We will give you more detailed aftercare advice in writing.

Will it be sore afterwards?

When the anaesthetic wears off, there will be some pain and discomfort for 2-5 days.

Regular painkillers such as paracetamol and/or ibuprofen, are effective. We can advise which painkillers to take but the ones you normally use are generally best.

Will there be much bleeding?

Any bleeding during the biopsy usually stops very quickly. We will ensure that you do not leave the hospital bleeding.

As long as the area is left undisturbed it should not start to bleed again. This means the wound must not be touched, washed, dabbed at, or warmed up.

You should avoid excessive movement or strenuous exercise, which could cause the wound to stretch open and re-bleed.

If the biopsy site does start to bleed again, apply pressure over the area for at least 15 minutes with a clean, rolled-up pad or gauze swabs. This should stop the bleeding but if it continues please contact the maxillofacial doctor on call (see back of leaflet).

Will it swell?

Localised swelling can last up to a week. It may limit how wide your mouth opens for a short time. Deeper tissue swelling may last longer and improve gradually.

There will be a scar in your mouth following the biopsy. This is not normally visible, but may feel lumpy. It will soften and improve over time.

You may experience a little ongoing tenderness at the biopsy site, or even slight loss of sensation (numbness or tingling) which usually gets better and will not affect the functions of your mouth.

If your pain has worsened after 5 days, or you develop increased swelling, oozing or heat, contact us as soon as possible.

Infection can cause a wound to re-open which will delay healing.

Risks and problems

Your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits of this procedure at your consultation and again when you sign your consent form. If there is anything you do not understand, please ask.

Smoking

We advise that you do not smoke for at least five days or as long as possible after an oral biopsy because it will increase the risk of the wound becoming infected and slow down healing.

It is recommended not to smoke for as long as possible before having a general anaesthetic. Please ask us about smoking cessation services at QVH.

Will I need another appointment?

Since the stitches are dissolvable, a follow-up appointment is not always necessary, but we will usually offer you an appointment for the results of the biopsy to be discussed or to check healing. This will typically be between four and six weeks after your procedure.

Further treatment or the need for more review appointments will depend on the results of your biopsy.

If the biopsy is urgent, then the results will be available sooner.

Further questions

It is important that you understand what this procedure involves and have talked through any concerns with your doctor beforehand.

If you have any questions or concerns before treatment or afterwards, please ask a member of the medical or nursing staff or telephone: **QVH switchboard: 01342 414000** and ask for the maxillofacial secretary of your named consultant.

For urgent enquiries, or out of hours, please ask for the maxillofacial doctor on duty.

Mouth (Oral) Biopsy

General Anaesthetic

Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or a different format.

Maxillofacial Unit
Issue 3 – Ref 0232
Approved by the Patient Information Group
Print July 2020 – Review July 2023

