

Surgical (Open) Breast Biopsy:

Home instructions

What is a surgical breast biopsy?

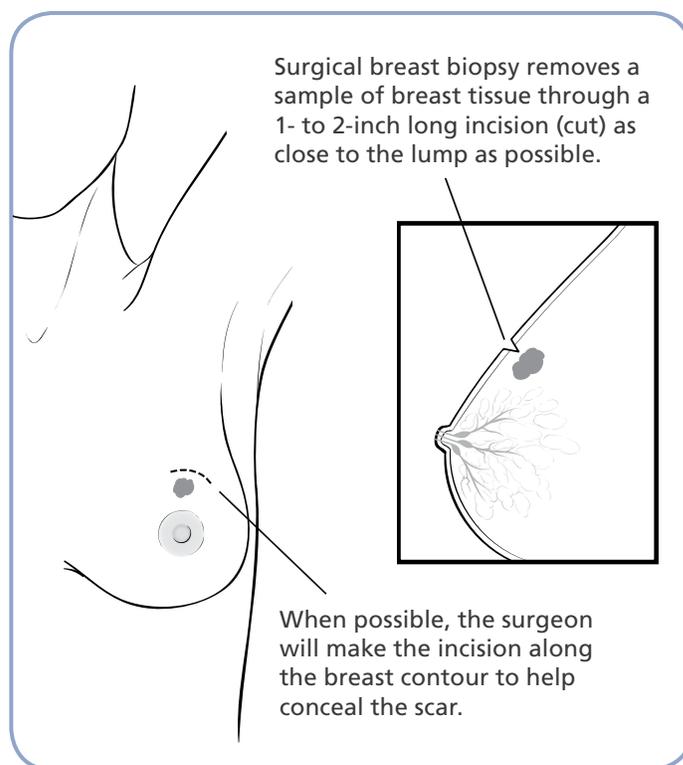
A surgical breast biopsy (often called an **open breast biopsy**) is a minor operation in which a short incision (cut) is made through the skin of the breast to allow the doctor to remove a small amount of breast tissue.

Why do I need it?

The purpose of the biopsy is to determine if the breast tissue is cancerous — not to treat breast cancer. The most common reason for a breast biopsy is because an abnormal area is found on an imaging test such as mammography or ultrasound. Or, an abnormal physical finding (such as a lump or thickened area) in the breast may also indicate the need for a biopsy. The good news is that 8 out of 10 of breast biopsies done in the U.S. show no cancer. However, it's important to check.

Talking with your doctor about this procedure

Before your surgery, your doctor will meet with you to describe the surgery and discuss the potential benefits, risks, and alternatives for your unique situation. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Your discussion with your doctor is the most important part of learning about your surgery and what to expect.



What should I expect after the procedure?

- **After the tissue sample is taken, the incision is closed** with small stitches (sutures) or strips of tape. It may also be covered with a dressing.
- **You will be taken to a recovery room** where your vital signs (temperature, pulse, breathing rate, and blood pressure) will be watched for about an hour or more.
- **You can usually go home the same day.** You will need a responsible adult to drive you home. Before you leave, your nurse will give you instructions. Make sure someone is there to take notes, because after surgery you may not remember everything.

How do I care for myself at home?

• Activity:

- Avoid intense exercise or heavy lifting for the first week. Otherwise, usual activities are fine.
- The surgery is a minor procedure and you can get back to most of your daily activities in one or two days. You can go back to work when your doctor says it's OK.

• Incision care:

- Your doctor will let you know when you can take off your dressings and when it's okay to take a bath or shower without worrying about getting your incision wet. In most cases, you can bathe or shower within 1 to 2 days.
- If you have tape strips on your incision, leave them in place until they fall off (usually within 7 to 10 days). Your doctor may take them off, along with any stitches, at your follow-up visit. If the edges of the strips start to peel, you may trim them back with scissors. Let your doctor know if the strips irritate your skin. In this case, you may need to take them off earlier.
- Watch for signs of infection at the incision site and report them to your doctor. Signs of infection include increased redness or swelling, pus, or fever over 101° F.

• Pain management:

- After the test, your breast may be sore and tender for several days. You may notice some bruising. Your doctor might prescribe pain medication. You can also use ice packs or an over-the-counter pain reliever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil).
- If you had general anesthesia, you may also have a sore throat from the breathing tube used to keep your airway open during the procedure. This should go away in 1 to 2 days.

How do I find out the results?

The breast tissue sample will be sent to a lab to be analyzed (tested). Analyzing the tissue sample shows whether the tissue is **benign** (non-cancerous) or **malignant** (cancerous). If the biopsy shows you have cancer, it also tells your doctor what type of cancer it is and helps guide your treatment plan.

Your doctor will let you know how long it should take to get the results, and how you will be notified. Be sure to go to your follow-up appointment to discuss your results with your doctor.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you experience any of the following during the week after the biopsy, or as otherwise instructed:

- A fever higher than 101° F
- Redness or swelling at the biopsy site that increases rather than gradually going away
- Severe pain at the biopsy site
- Other: _____

Questions for my doctor:
