Midlands Family Medicine
Let our family care for yours!

611 West Francis St. Suite 100
North Platte, NE 69101
Phone: (308) 534-2532
Fax: (308) 534-6615

Education

Skin (Cutaneous) Biopsy

What is a skin biopsy?

A skin biopsy is the removal of a small piece of skin for lab tests. It may be done to help diagnose a problem with the skin. Another name for this procedure is cutaneous biopsy.

When is it used?

A skin biopsy will help your health care provider make a diagnosis of your problem. For example:

- You may have an internal disease that a skin biopsy may explain.
- You may have a skin disease or cancer.
- Your skin may have become discolored.
- Your skin may be inflamed.

Alternatives to this procedure include:

- to proceed with treatment without a firm diagnosis
- to choose not to have treatment, recognizing the risks of your condition
- to take a watchful approach and reevaluate the lesion or disorder at a future time.

You should ask your health care provider about these choices.

How do I prepare for a cutaneous biopsy?

Follow the instructions you are given by your health care provider.

What happens during the procedure?

In most cases your health care provider will numb your skin with a spray or shot. There are 3 types of skin biopsy: incisional, shave, and punch.

- For an incisional biopsy, a knife called a scalpel is used to take small piece of skin. An excisional biopsy is a special kind of incisional biopsy: a whole lump or abnormal area is taken out rather than just a sample. The skin is then sewn back together.
- A punch biopsy is done with a sharp, circular knife, which takes a little circle of skin about one quarter inch wide and deep. This allows deeper layers of skin to be examined.
- A shave biopsy is the removal of just the surface of a usually tiny piece of skin. It may also be used to remove a small growth on the skin. A scalpel or razor-blade-like tool is used to skim the surface.

What happens after the procedure?

You may stay in the treatment center for a short time for observation before you go home.

Follow your provider's instructions for taking care of your wound. You may have some soreness around the cut for 1 or 2 weeks.

Ask your provider how you will get your results and how soon you should return for follow-up.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

This procedure will help your health care provider make a more accurate diagnosis.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

- You should expect a small scar from the biopsy.
- You may have infection or bleeding.

You should ask your health care provider how these risks apply to you.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your provider right away if:

- You have bleeding that cannot be stopped by putting pressure on the wound.
- Your wound becomes red or has pus or you develop a fever (signs of infection).

Call during office hours if:

- You have questions about the procedure or its result.
- You want to make another appointment.

Adult Health Advisor 2006.4; Copyright © 2006 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All Rights Reserved. Developed by McKesson Provider Technologies. This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.