

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Bone marrow biopsy and aspiration

Your consultant has advised you should have a bone marrow biopsy. This leaflet will explain about the procedure and aftercare.

What is a bone marrow biopsy and aspiration?

Bone marrow is the spongy tissue and fluid, which is inside some of the larger bones in the body. The marrow is where you make red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets from cells called 'stem cells'.

A biopsy is when a small sample is removed from a part of the body. The sample of tissue is then examined under the microscope to look for abnormal cells (other methods of testing may be used).

Aspiration means removing some fluid. In this example it is the removal of a sample of bone marrow fluid, which is examined under the microscope to look for abnormal cells (other methods of testing may be used).

What preparation is needed before the test?

You may need a blood test shortly before these tests to check how well your blood will clot. This is to make sure that you are not likely to bleed from the biopsy site.

If you take any medications that can affect blood clotting such as aspirin or warfarin you may be advised to either stop taking them or reduce them prior to the test. You may need to discuss your medication with your doctor if you take such medication for other conditions.

Please tell your doctor if you have previously had an allergic reaction to local anaesthetic.

What are the risks of bone marrow biopsy and aspiration?

Complications are uncommon. In a small number of cases there is some bleeding from the biopsy site. This is usually minor and soon stops.

How are these tests done?

Bone marrow samples are usually taken from the top of the pelvis bone. This is the bone that you can easily feel just below each side of the waist.

Occasionally other large bones are used, such as the sternum (breastbone).

You will usually be asked to lie on a couch on your side or on your front. The skin over the bone is cleaned and local anaesthetic is injected into a small area of skin just over the bone. This stings a little at first but soon makes the skin numb.

To aspirate bone marrow fluid a needle is pushed through the anaesthetised skin into the bone. A syringe is used to draw out some liquid bone marrow. As the liquid is withdrawn you may experience a brief, sharp pain in your bone (and possibly in the buttock and leg if the pelvic bone is used).

To biopsy the bone marrow a second, thicker hollow needle is inserted into the bone. This is rotated as it is pushed slightly forward to take a small sample of bone marrow into the hollow centre of the needle. This may cause a dull pain sensation for a short time. The needle is then removed and pressure applied to prevent bleeding.

After the test

You will need to lie on a bed or couch and be observed for a short time to check you have no serious bleeding.

You may have some discomfort and bruising over the test site for a few days, which may be eased by taking paracetamol.

The doctor or nurse should tell you how long the results of the tests will take to come back.

If you need advice or support at any time please call:

- The Haematology Nurse Specialists on 01623 622515, extension 3081, between 8.30am and 4.30pm Monday to Fridays
- The nurse in charge of ward 24 on 01623 622515, extension 2324, 2424 or 2305.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

To be completed by the Communications office
Leaflet code: PIL202503-06-BMBA
Created: July 2017 / Revised: March 2025 / Review
Date: March 2027