



BRISBANE ISLAND SKIN CANCER CLINIC

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BIOPSY

Why perform a biopsy?

A biopsy is used when the diagnosis of a spot is uncertain. It provides enough information to be sure of the diagnosis in the great majority of cases, with only a very small scar being made. It is also used where there is a possibility of a major procedure being required (eg a flap or graft) to remove the problem, to confirm the diagnosis before performing the operation. If the spot is very small a biopsy may be all that is needed to remove the whole problem.

How is a biopsy performed?

Local anaesthetic is injected under the skin in the area around the growth. The skin is cleaned with antiseptic solution. A biopsy punch is usually used to remove a small part of the spot. A biopsy punch is a round knife, like an apple corer, but much smaller. They come in sizes from 2mm to 8mm in diameter. A stitch or two may be put into the area to hold it together and prevent bleeding. A dressing is usually applied. The small piece of tissue is sent to the pathologist to be analysed under a microscope, to give a diagnosis.

What are the risks?

As with any type of surgery, there are risks of bleeding and infection. Bleeding can be a problem in the first 24 hours. If the wound bleeds, this can be stopped by applying firm pressure with a handkerchief or towel over the wound, continuously, for about ten minutes. If the bleeding is from a limb, the limb should be elevated above the heart. If this does not work please return to, or ring the surgery. Infection, if it happens, usually takes three to five days. There is usually pain, redness and some discharge from the wound. Please see the doctor if you think this may be occurring. There is also a very small risk of damage to structures under the biopsy site. This small risk is slightly higher on the face, where other structures are much closer to the skin surface. These other structures include nerves, tear ducts, joints and muscles. Scarring from biopsy is minimal except for the rare person whose skin makes keloid scars.

How do I look after the biopsy wound?

Keeping the wound clean and dry is the best way to prevent infection. Leave the dressing on for about 48 hours, or 24 hours on the face. Keeping the wound dry involves glad wrap, plastic bags, or waterproof dressings being applied over the wound when showering or bathing, or keeping the area out of the bath or shower. If you want to further prevent infection, wiping the area with betadine or dettol is a reasonable idea but is not necessary for a good result in most cases.

When do I see the doctor?

Usually you will be asked to return to the doctor in about one week's time; however if your wound is on the face, you may be seen earlier. At this appointment, the stitches will be removed and you will have the results explained. If further surgery is required, this may be done at this appointment, or on another occasion as time permits.