



Your Liver. Your Life.

Liver Biopsy

Why is the liver important?

The liver is the second largest organ in your body and is located under your rib cage on the right side. It weighs about three pounds and is shaped like a football that is flat on one side.

The liver performs many jobs in your body. It processes what you eat and drink into energy and nutrients your body can use. The liver also removes harmful substances from your blood.

What is a liver biopsy?

A liver biopsy is a medical procedure used to remove a small piece of liver tissue so doctors can examine the liver's condition.

Why is a liver biopsy done?

When other tests indicate that your liver may not be working properly, your doctor may want to do a liver biopsy to more accurately learn the condition of your liver.

A liver biopsy is an accurate way to learn the condition of your liver. A liver biopsy helps:

- diagnose liver disease and the stage it is in;
- detect cancer and infections; and
- provide reasons for liver swelling or abnormal levels of liver enzymes.

How do you prepare for a liver biopsy?

Before the biopsy, your doctor will take blood samples to make sure your blood clots properly. You will not be able to eat or drink anything for eight hours before the test.

It is important to tell your doctor:

- all the medications (prescription, non-prescription, supplements) you are taking
- bleeding problems you may have
- allergies you may have
- if you are pregnant

Your doctor also may give you additional instructions regarding your medications.

How is the liver biopsy performed?

A liver biopsy is done at a hospital and can be performed in the following ways:

Traditional

You will be asked to lie on your back with your right hand above your head. After injecting a local anesthetic to numb the area, a doctor will make a small cut in your right side near your rib cage and insert a needle to get a tiny sample of your liver tissue. An ultrasound image of your liver may be used in the process to help guide the needle. You will need to stay very still during the process and will need

to hold your breath for five to ten seconds when the needle is being injected. You may feel pressure and a dull pain. The entire procedure lasts about twenty minutes.

Laparoscopic

Your doctor will insert a tube called a laparoscope through a small cut in your abdomen. The laparoscope sends images of your liver to a monitor. Your doctor watches the monitor and uses instruments in the laparoscope to take tiny tissue samples from your liver. The laparoscopic method is used when your doctor needs tissue samples from a specific part of your liver.

Transvenous

Your doctor will insert a tube called a catheter into a vein in your neck and guide it to your liver. The doctor puts a biopsy needle into the catheter and guides into your liver to take tiny tissue samples. The transvenous method is used if you have blood clotting problems or have fluid in your abdomen.

What happens after the liver biopsy is done?

After the biopsy, a bandage will be put over the cut and you will need to lie on your right side for a few hours. Afterwards, you will receive directions about limiting physical activity. You may be sore in the area of the biopsy and in your right shoulder. The pain usually goes away in a few hours or days. Your doctor also may provide other instructions after the biopsy.

What are the risks of a liver biopsy?

Liver biopsy does have some risks but they are not common. Risks include internal bleeding, injury to the lung, gallbladder or kidney, and infection.