

Liver Biopsy

What Is A Liver Biopsy?

A liver biopsy is a procedure used to obtain a small sample of liver tissue, which is then analysed under a microscope to diagnose or monitor liver conditions. This procedure is essential in diagnosing various liver diseases, such as hepatitis, fatty liver disease, cirrhosis, and liver cancer. It also helps assess the severity of liver damage, including fibrosis and inflammation. Liver biopsies provide crucial information that imaging tests and blood tests cannot always reveal, making them an important tool for liver specialists when determining treatment plans.

There are several types of liver biopsies, depending on your medical condition and the reason for the biopsy. The most common is the percutaneous (through the skin) biopsy. However, a transjugular biopsy, performed via a vein in the neck, or a laparoscopic biopsy, using small incisions and a camera for guidance, may be recommended based on individual health factors.

Why Is A Liver Biopsy Performed?

A liver biopsy is typically performed to:

- Diagnose unexplained abnormalities in liver function tests.
- Identify the cause of jaundice, an enlarged liver, or abnormal imaging results.
- Monitor liver disease progression, especially in chronic conditions like hepatitis B or C, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), or alcoholic liver disease.
- Assess the extent of fibrosis (scarring) or inflammation in the liver.
- Detect or confirm the presence of liver cancer, cirrhosis, or other liver abnormalities.
- Evaluate how well treatment is working for certain liver diseases, such as autoimmune hepatitis.

The biopsy helps doctors tailor treatment plans more precisely and monitor the effectiveness of ongoing therapies.

What To Expect From A Liver Biopsy

Before the procedure, your doctor will discuss the type of biopsy best suited to your condition and explain the process in detail. Blood tests will be performed to ensure your blood can clot properly, reducing the risk of bleeding.

- **Percutaneous biopsy:** This is the most common type of liver biopsy. A needle is inserted through the skin into the liver to extract a tissue sample. Local anaesthetic is applied to the area, and the procedure is usually done under ultrasound or CT guidance to ensure accuracy.
- **Transjugular biopsy:** For patients with bleeding disorders, this type of biopsy is safer, as the tissue is accessed through a vein in the neck, reducing the risk of excessive bleeding.
- **Laparoscopic biopsy:** Small incisions are made in the abdomen, and a camera guides the surgeon to the liver for a more targeted biopsy. This is often done when other abdominal issues also need to be investigated.

The biopsy typically lasts between 20 to 30 minutes. You will be monitored for several hours post-procedure to ensure no immediate complications.

Risks Associated With The Procedure

Although liver biopsies are generally considered safe, there are potential risks, including:

- Pain or discomfort at the biopsy site, usually managed with painkillers.
- Internal bleeding, which is rare but may require further intervention.
- Infection at the biopsy site or within the liver.
- Injury to nearby organs, such as the gallbladder or lungs, although this is uncommon.

In the rare event of complications, your medical team will act quickly to provide appropriate treatment.

Recovery

After a liver biopsy, you'll be asked to rest for a few hours in a recovery area while your medical team monitors you for any immediate complications. You may feel some mild discomfort or pain at the biopsy site, which can

usually be managed with over-the-counter pain relief. Most patients can go home the same day, but you should arrange for someone to drive you home and rest for the remainder of the day.

For the next 24 hours, you should avoid strenuous activities, such as heavy lifting or exercise. Depending on the type of biopsy, your doctor may advise you to avoid these activities for up to a week. Follow-up instructions will be given regarding any signs of complications to watch for, such as worsening pain, fever, or bleeding.

Results And Follow-Up

The results of a liver biopsy typically take about a week. Once your doctor receives the results, they will discuss the findings with you and explain how they affect your diagnosis or treatment plan. A liver biopsy can provide critical insights into the health of your liver and guide your next steps in managing liver conditions. The prognosis will depend on the underlying disease, but a liver biopsy helps in making early diagnoses and improving treatment outcomes.

Why Choose Birmingham Liver Clinic?

At Birmingham Liver Clinic, we are a leading centre for liver diagnostics and treatment in the UK. Our consultant hepatologists and liver surgeons are highly experienced in performing liver biopsies and other advanced diagnostic procedures. We use the latest technology and ensure that each patient receives exceptional care tailored to their individual needs. Whether you require a liver biopsy for diagnosis or to monitor ongoing treatment, our expert team is here to provide comprehensive support.

With our state-of-the-art facilities and a team of highly skilled professionals, you can feel confident that you're in safe hands throughout your care journey at Birmingham Liver Clinic.

Contact Us

For more information or to book a consultation, contact Birmingham Liver Clinic today.