



What is a liver biopsy?

A liver biopsy is a medical procedure. Your doctor will remove a very small piece (or *sample*) of your liver. Your liver sample will be sent to a laboratory to be studied. You should not have to stay in the hospital longer than four to six hours after the biopsy. A liver biopsy is usually not painful. However, you will still need to avoid certain kinds of physical activity for one to two weeks after the biopsy so that your body can heal.

How will a liver biopsy help me?

A liver biopsy will help you and your doctor find out more about the health of your liver. This is important if you have hepatitis C or another liver disease and you are trying to decide about treatment. A liver biopsy can also be helpful if your doctor is not sure what is causing your liver problem.

How is a liver biopsy done?

A liver biopsy is done in a hospital. You will need to lie flat on your back during the procedure. First, the doctor will “prep” you by finding the exact location of the liver inside your body. Then, the doctor will clean the skin above this location and give you an injection (or *shot*) of local anesthetic to numb the area. After the area is numb, the doctor will insert a biopsy needle to take out a small piece of liver. This part of the procedure is done quickly.



Is a liver biopsy painful?

Most people who have a liver biopsy say that it does not hurt. You may feel a sting when the doctor gives you the shot of anesthetic. You might also have a feeling of pressure when the doctor inserts the biopsy needle. Some people say that they feel this pressure in their right shoulder, as well.

What happens after the liver biopsy is done?

After the biopsy is done, your doctor might ask you to roll over onto your side and lie still for one or two hours. This is to make sure that you do not have bleeding or other problems caused by getting up too soon. After a while, your doctor might order blood tests, just to make sure that there are no other problems. Before long, you will be told that you can go home. Follow your doctor’s advice not to lift heavy weights or exercise too hard for about two weeks, so that your body has enough time to heal.

When should I not have a liver biopsy?

You should not have a liver biopsy if you have used aspirin or another blood-thinning medicine the week before your procedure. You should not take these medicines in the week after your biopsy either. Make sure that you tell your doctor about all the medicines you have been taking or that you plan to take. You also should not have a liver biopsy if your doctor thinks that your liver disease has progressed to the point that your blood does not clot normally.

What are the risks of a liver biopsy?

A liver biopsy is generally very safe. But, as is true for any medical procedure, there are some risks. These risks include

- bleeding from the liver;
- puncturing of other organs, if something goes wrong when the needle is inserted;
- very rarely, death (1 in 10,000 cases).

Does everyone with liver disease need a biopsy?

No, not everyone. But, if you have a serious liver problem like hepatitis C, a biopsy can be very useful. In some cases, your doctor might need to do a biopsy to find out what is wrong or to recommend the best treatment.

How many liver biopsies will I need?

Most people need a liver biopsy only once. Some people need them several times. If your doctor thinks that your liver is changing, you might have to have more than one. You might also need to have more than one liver biopsy if you take medicine for hepatitis C or if you have a liver transplant.

Who can I contact for more information?

Call your local VA medical center and visit the Veterans Affairs Hepatitis C Web site at <http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>

Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hepatitis Toll-Free Information Line at 1-888-4-HEPCDC (1-888-443-7232) and visit the Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis>

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