

What You Need to Know About Liver Biopsy

Your doctor has ordered a liver biopsy as a procedure to help diagnose an illness with your liver. This is an out-patient procedure done by a radiologist in Maine Medical Center's radiology department. Prior to the procedure, you will have to have blood work done and a history and physical completed by your physician. The blood work and physical/history is used to ensure you can safely have this procedure.

Approximately a week before your scheduled liver biopsy, a MMC radiology nurse will call you. If a message is left, please return the call. The nurse call is intended to give you important instructions regarding the liver biopsy. If these instructions are not followed, your safety could be compromised. If several messages are left for you to call back and you do not return the call, your procedure will be cancelled and will need to be re-scheduled. The radiologist will not perform the procedure without the nurse call occurring.

Safety Instructions

If you are taking aspirin products, Advil, other NSAIDS, or Coumadin, you will be asked to stop taking the medicine four days prior to your procedure. If you take Coumadin, your clotting time will be re-checked the day before your procedure. After midnight on the day of your procedure, you will be asked not to eat or drink. Following the procedure, you will be in recovery for a minimum of two hours for monitoring. When you leave, it is asked that you have an escort. You cannot drive! It is strongly recommended that someone is with you for the first 24 hours following the liver biopsy. The person should be watching for signs that you are bleeding as this is the most common complication following a liver biopsy.

Signs to look for are:

- confusion
- lethargy
- shortness of breath
- bleeding from biopsy site
- dizziness/fainting
- abdominal pain/tenderness and/or abdominal distention

If you have any of these signs, call your doctor or go to the nearest emergency room.



The Procedure

You will likely receive a sedative prior to the liver biopsy. This will be discussed with the radiologist on the day of the procedure. The consent form will also be signed at this time. Your comfort and safety are the top priorities. If you have any questions or concerns regarding sedation management, please ask the radiology nurse during the pre-procedure phone call.

The actual liver biopsy is performed under local anesthesia. In the majority of cases, the radiologist uses ultrasound to visualize the liver. With a needle, a sample of the liver is taken. You will be asked to take a breath and hold it in so that the movement of breathing does not interfere with the placement of the biopsy needle. In a few of the cases, the liver biopsy needs to be obtained from a particular site of the liver and CT scan is used instead of ultrasound.

Following the liver biopsy, a bandage will be placed on the biopsy site. You will be monitored in recovery for a few hours. Your vital signs will be checked and you will be asked to lie relatively still.

After Discharge

The day of your biopsy, you should rest. No strenuous activity for 24 hours. No heavy lifting of 15 pounds or greater for 48 hours. You may return to work/school the day after the biopsy. You may bathe and/or shower. Resume your diet, starting with small meals. After 24 hours, you may remove the band-aid.

The actual liver tissue obtained from the biopsy goes to the pathologist for examination. You will follow-up with your doctor who ordered the liver biopsy. Your doctor will share the biopsy results with you and discuss its meaning.