



*St. Luke's  
Hospital*

A Sutter Health Affiliate

*With You. For Life.*

# The Breast Health Center

## **What You Should Know about Biopsy Techniques**

If a lump is felt in your breast or if there is an abnormality on your mammogram, your doctor will likely suggest you have a biopsy. The far majority of lumps are not cancer, but getting a small amount of the tissue or cells in the lump is the only way to tell for sure. If, based on the needle biopsy, your doctor can tell that the lump is not cancer there is usually no reason to surgically remove the lump. There are essentially four ways to get a biopsy: fine needle aspiration (FNA), core biopsy, stereotactic biopsy, and surgical biopsy.

### *Fine Needle Aspiration (FNA)*

The FNA procedure uses a very small needle (smaller than a needle used to draw blood) to remove some cells from the breast lump. This procedure is usually done by a pathologist (an M.D.) and takes about an hour. The cells are then put into a slide and looked at under a microscope. This enables the pathologist to tell if the breast lump is benign (not cancerous) or possibly cancerous. The procedure is generally a little uncomfortable but usually not painful, and it is possible to return to work the same day. The results are known the day after the procedure, at which time your doctor will call you with the results.

### *Core Biopsy*

The core biopsy procedure uses a slightly larger needle to remove small “cores” of tissue (about the size of a pen lead). Often this is done by the radiologist using an ultrasound machine to exactly locate the mass. The whole procedure takes about an hour. These samples are then processed and looked at under a microscope. Again, the pathologist can then tell whether the breast lump is benign or cancerous. Local anesthesia is used to numb the skin and the area of the biopsy. After the procedure there can be some mild soreness and sometimes slight bruising. It is recommended that you not take aspirin or ibuprofen-containing medicines for 2 days (although you can take Tylenol). You can return to work when you feel ready, but we ask that you not do any strenuous activity with your arms for a day or so. The results of the biopsy are usually known within 1-2 days and your doctor will call you with the results.

## *Stereotactic Biopsy*

The stereotactic biopsy procedure is used to get samples of breast tissue that cannot be felt by your doctor and cannot be seen by ultrasound. The far majority of stereotactic breast biopsies are done for calcifications in the breast. This outpatient procedure is done by radiologists using only local anesthesia and takes about an hour. They use special equipment and computer guidance to remove cores of the breast tissue for analysis. The samples are evaluated under the microscope and the results are known within 2-3 days.

## *Surgical Biopsy*

Very infrequently needle biopsies are inconclusive or, for a variety of reasons, impossible to obtain. In this instance, you may need to have a small surgery to remove the area of concern. Breast biopsies are done in the operating room with local anesthesia and some intravenous sedation. A small ball of tissue is removed and sent for analysis under the microscope. It usually takes about an hour, and you can go home the same day. There is some mild soreness, and you may require pain medicine for a day. It is also recommended that you avoid strenuous activity with your arms for a week after the surgery. The results are usually known the next day, and your surgeon will call you with the results.

*See what St. Luke's has to offer. Quality care, close to home.*

**[www.stlukes-sf.org](http://www.stlukes-sf.org)**