

Liver Biopsy

What is a Biopsy?

A biopsy is a tiny sample of body tissue – in this case, liver tissue. The tissue is prepared and stained in a laboratory, so the physician can view it under a microscope. This usually helps the physician make a specific diagnosis and determine the extent and seriousness of the condition. It is vital information for determining treatment.

The Procedure

The liver biopsy is usually performed on an outpatient basis. A mild sedative may be given to the patient prior to the procedure. Sometimes, an ultrasound or echo machine is used to identify the best location to make the biopsy. Usually, the physician can make this determination simply by examination. The patient lies quietly on the back or slightly to the left side. That area of the skin where the biopsy will be done is carefully cleaned. Then, a local anesthetic agent is used to numb the skin and tissue below. A specially designed thin needle is inserted through the skin. At this point, the physician will tell the patient how to breathe. The needle is advanced into and out of the liver. This takes only 1 or 2 seconds. A slender core of tissue is removed with the needle, and is then processed through the laboratory. The entire procedure from start to finish lasts only 15 to 20 minutes.