



What is a Skin Biopsy: Punch, Shave, and Incisional

What is a skin biopsy?

A **skin biopsy** is a procedure where a small sample of skin is removed so it can be examined under a microscope. This helps your doctor diagnose skin conditions, including infections, inflammatory diseases, and skin cancers.

1. Punch Biopsy

- **What it is:** A small, circular tool (like a tiny cookie cutter) removes a core of skin including the top layer (epidermis), middle layer (dermis), and sometimes the fat layer underneath.
- **When it is used:** To diagnose rashes, small lesions, or suspicious moles.
- **Procedure:** Usually done under local anaesthetic. The wound may be closed with a stitch or left to heal naturally.
- **Aftercare:** Keep it clean, change dressings as instructed, avoid soaking in water, and watch for signs of infection.

2. Shave Biopsy

- **What it is:** The top layers of skin are shaved off using a small blade.
- **When it is used:** Often for raised skin lesions or non-melanoma suspicious growths.
- **Procedure:** Performed under local anaesthetic. Usually does **not require stitches**.
- **Aftercare:** Keep the area clean, use antibiotic ointment if advised, and cover with a dressing. Minor bleeding and scabbing are normal.

3. Incisional Biopsy

- **What it is:** Only part of a larger lesion is removed for testing, rather than the whole lesion.
- **When it is used:** When the lesion is large, in a delicate location, or when a diagnosis is needed before full removal.
- **Procedure:** Done under local anaesthetic. May require a stitch or dressing depending on size and location.
- **Aftercare:** Similar to punch biopsy; monitor for infection and follow wound care instructions.

Risks and Complications

All skin biopsies are generally safe but may have some risks:

- Bleeding or bruising
- Infection
- Scarring or changes in skin colour
- Rarely, allergic reaction to anaesthetic

Results

- Results usually take **1–2 weeks**.
- Your doctor will contact you with the results and discuss any further treatment if needed.

Before Your Biopsy

- Inform your doctor if you are on blood thinners or have a bleeding disorder.
- Avoid applying creams or lotions to the area unless instructed.

After Your Biopsy

- Follow your doctor's instructions for wound care.
- Avoid scratching or picking at the site.
- Contact your doctor if you notice increased redness, swelling, pus, or pain.

Remember: Skin biopsies are routine procedures and are essential for accurate diagnosis and treatment of skin conditions.