

# Choosing Wisely<sup>®</sup>

*An initiative of the ABIM Foundation*



## Breast biopsy

### Understand what choices you have

**A** breast biopsy is a test of breast tissue to see if you have cancer. Usually, you get a biopsy if there is a suspicious change in your breast. Your doctor may find the change during a physical exam, mammogram, or ultrasound test.

A breast biopsy is a common procedure for women in the U.S. There are almost a million done each year.

In a biopsy, the doctor removes a small amount of tissue. A biopsy is done with a needle or through surgery. Most of the time, a needle biopsy is the best choice. Here's why:

#### **A needle biopsy is easier on the body.**

With a needle biopsy, the breast is not cut. A machine, such as a mammogram machine, takes pictures of the breast and guides the needle. A very small piece of tissue is taken out through the needle.



During surgical or “open” biopsy, doctors cut the breast. They take out all or part of the suspicious tissue. This can leave a scar that is one to two inches long. It can even change the shape of your breast.

With a needle biopsy, you have faster treatment and better cosmetic results. And you have less worry.

### **A needle biopsy lets you avoid unneeded surgery.**

Most breast biopsies do not show cancer. If you have a needle biopsy and no cancer is found, then you do not need any surgery at all. This is good, because surgery always has risks. It can be painful and inconvenient. And it leaves a permanent scar.

If a needle biopsy does show cancer, you will only need one surgery. But with a surgical biopsy, you will usually need a second surgery.

### **A needle biopsy has fewer side effects than surgical biopsy.**

Side effects of surgery include the following:

- Bleeding
- Wound infection
- Longer recovery
- The need for prescription pain medicine
- Scars (even if there is no cancer)

With needle biopsy, a few women have some bruising. The bruising goes away, and the breast will look normal again.

If surgical biopsy shows cancer, a second surgery adds to stress. Sometimes, having several breast surgeries can change the way the breast looks. You might even need a mastectomy—in which the entire breast is removed.

### **A needle biopsy costs less.**

Surgical biopsies are done in a hospital or surgical center, and they can cost thousands of dollars. But a core-needle biopsy costs as little as \$500. It is done in a radiology or breast-imaging center, or in the doctor's office.

### **When should you have a surgical biopsy of the breast?**

In some cases, you may need a surgical biopsy. For example, sometimes the imaging machine that guides a needle biopsy cannot easily provide an image of the suspicious part of the breast.

However, most women can have a needle biopsy. If your doctor recommends a surgical biopsy, it probably is needed. But don't be afraid to ask why you need it instead of a needle biopsy.

This report is for you to use when talking with your healthcare provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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