

The University of Utah
Department of Neurology
Neuromuscular Program

Muscle Biopsy Information

After evaluation in the Neuromuscular Clinic, your physicians have recommended that you have a muscle biopsy to aid in making your diagnosis.

We wish to provide you with information about the biopsy procedure, what to expect during the biopsy, and care after the biopsy.

At the time of the biopsy, you will be placed in a comfortable lying position. This is a sterile procedure and the skin at the biopsy site will be scrubbed and the surgeon performing the biopsy will be in a sterile gown. The biopsy will be performed under local anesthesia, which means that a portion of skin over the muscle to be biopsied will be made numb. As the anesthetic is injected under the skin you may experience a stinging and burning sensation. Opening the skin to expose the muscle should not cause discomfort. Our experience indicates that there may be momentary discomfort when the surgeon removes the small piece of muscle. There should be no real discomfort when the skin is stitched together.

After the biopsy you should keep the biopsied limb elevated as much as possible and walk as little as possible for the next 24 to 36 hours. You should not plan to drive yourself home after the biopsy and should make arrangements to be accompanied by a companion who can drive. You should also apply an ice pack frequently over the biopsy site during this time.

You may experience some dull pain at the biopsy site as the local anesthetic wears off. Elevation and ice will help the pain, but we will give you a prescription for Tylenol # 3 (with codeine) to help with the pain if necessary during the first few days. As the pain lessens, you may use nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Ibuprofen (200 mg, 2 to 4 times a day) which can be purchased over the counter.

After the biopsy is complete, a large piece of tape will be placed over the biopsy site. You should not get the area wet for the first 24 hours, but after that you may gently bathe around the area. The tape will begin to loosen in several days and the site can be covered with a regular bandaid if that is more comfortable. In 7 to 10 days the skin stitches should be removed. This can be done by any physician or nurse.

The biopsy site should begin to heal over several weeks, and be completely healed in several months. If the site becomes red and angry looking, and hot to the touch, you should contact your local physician. If you live close to the University of Utah, we will be happy to see you. Please call (801) 585-5885 if you have any questions.

The muscle biopsy is prepared for examination under the microscope by pathologists. Preparation and basic examination of the biopsy takes 3 to 5 working days. Sometimes special tests are necessary, and these may take 1 or more weeks. We will contact you by telephone to give you the preliminary results, and tell you when to expect results from special tests if they are necessary.