Fine Needle Aspiration of a Thyroid Nodule Using Ultrasound

What is a thyroid FNA?
A fine needle aspiration (FNA) or biopsy of a thyroid nodule is a simple test to check a thyroid nodule or mass for cancer cells. A very fine, small needle is used to remove fluid and cells from the nodule or mass. The fluid and cells are then sent to the lab for review.

What to Expect before a Thyroid FNA
You can eat normally before your biopsy. Before the biopsy is done, the doctor will explain what will happen, answer your questions and ask you to sign a consent form.

What to Expect during a Thyroid FNA
For the procedure, you will lie on a table with a pillow under your neck. An ultrasound (a machine that sends sound waves through the skin and creates images on a TV screen) is used to look at the site of the nodule or mass. A clear jelly is put on your neck and an ultrasound probe is used to look for nodules. If a nodule(s) is found, your neck will be cleaned with special soap. A numbing medicine is used to help prevent pain. A fine needle is passed 3 to 6 times into the nodule or mass so that enough cells are removed. A cytotechnologist is also there to decide if enough samples have been collected.

The biopsy can take anywhere from 15-60 minutes. It will depend on how many nodules are biopsied. The biopsy results are sent to your doctor within 5 days. Although the test is not perfect, a thyroid needle biopsy should give enough information for your doctor to decide your course of treatment.

What to Expect after the Biopsy
You may feel mild discomfort during the procedure. After the numbing medicine wears off, you may have soreness for 1-2 days. We suggest using Tylenol for soreness. A small amount of bruising is also common.

After the Procedure
A thyroid biopsy is considered safe and almost never results in complications. Patients often return home or go back to work after the biopsy, without any ill effects. You may resume your normal routine after the test with no restrictions.

When to Call
Please call us if:
- You feel dizzy, faint or light headed.
- Your pain around the site gets worse rather than better 2-3 days later.
- You do not feel well and have a fever greater than 100.4 F (38 C).
- You develop redness and swelling around the site.
Phone Numbers

University Hospital
Monday - Friday (7:30am – 4:30pm)
  • Ultrasound (608) 262-5279
  • Nurse (608) 422-8182.

If you live outside the area, call toll-free (800) 323-8942.

Evenings, weekends and holidays, call your primary care doctor or go to your local emergency room.

The American Center Specialties Clinic
Monday - Friday (8am - 5pm)
(608) 242-2888

After hours, weekends and holidays, you will reach the paging operator. Ask to speak to the resident on call for Endocrinology. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2018 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6368