



P R O C E D U R E I N F O S H E E T

LIVER BIOPSY

A biopsy is a small specimen of body tissue. This tissue is prepared and stained in the pathology laboratory. A pathologist can then view it under a microscope. By so doing, the pathologist can often make a specific diagnosis and determine the extent and seriousness of the condition. This information is often vital in determining the treatment.

THE PROCEDURE

A liver biopsy is usually performed as an outpatient. A radiologist uses ultrasound or CT imaging guidance to identify the best location to make the biopsy. The patient lies quietly on the back or slightly to the left side. The skin is carefully cleaned. A local anesthetic agent like lidocaine 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 instruct the patient on how to breathe. The needle is quickly advanced into and out of the liver, taking only 1-2 seconds. A slender core of tissue is thereby obtained, which is then processed through the laboratory. The entire procedure from start to finish requires only 15-20 minutes.

RECOVERY

The patient is kept at rest for several hours following the exam with medical personnel checking the heart rate and blood pressure. At times, there is some discomfort in the chest or shoulder. This is usually transient and medication is available if needed. The patient is then given instructions regarding activity and eating and then discharged home. Activity is usually restricted for a day or so.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS OF A LIVER BIOPSY?

In most instances, a liver biopsy is obtained quickly and with no problems. As noted, there is occasionally some temporary discomfort in the right side or shoulder. Internal bleeding can sometimes occur as can a leak of bile from the liver or gallbladder. These problems are usually handled conservatively without the need for surgery.



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