Bone marrow biopsy

This information sheet is intended for people who are having a bone marrow biopsy, as well as family members and friends accompanying them.



Why is this test done?

This test shows whether your bone marrow is producing a normal number of blood cells.

If the number of blood cells is abnormal, the test can help determine why. It can also show whether you have a blood disorder or cancer. In some cases, it can be used to check how well a treatment is working.

What is a bone marrow biopsy?

A biopsy involves removing a small sample of bone and bone marrow. Bone marrow is found inside your bones.

Bone marrow is where blood cells are made: red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets.

The test takes about 15 to 20 minutes.

Possible complications

A bone marrow biopsy is generally well tolerated. The test does not damage the bone or bone marrow.

After the test, you may have some mild discomfort or pain for a few days. You may also have a bruise (a collection of blood under the skin), which will go away over time.

Serious complications are rare, and most people quickly return to their usual activities.

How is a bone marrow biopsy done?

A bone marrow biopsy is usually done at the back of the pelvis. Less often, it is done at the breastbone (sternum).

The doctor will explain each step as the procedure is being done. You will lie on your side or stomach throughout the test.

1. We clean the skin around your hip, just above the pelvic bone.
2. We give you an injection of medication to numb the area. This will help reduce pain during the test.
3. We then insert a special needle through the skin and into the bone. The needle reaches the bone marrow.

Santé Québec Montérégie-Ouest
Novembre 2026

Santé Québec

4. A syringe is then attached to the needle. We use it to draw out a small amount of fluid and stem cells. You may feel some pain during this step, but it lasts only a few seconds.
5. If needed, we turn the needle slightly. This allows us to take a small sample of bone. You may feel some mild pressure.
6. We remove the needle and immediately apply pressure to the area where the needle was inserted to prevent bleeding.
7. We put on a bandage. Before you leave, we make sure that you are not bleeding.

Before the test

Tell the doctor if:

- You take a blood thinner that prevents blood clots/thins your blood (e.g., Aspirin, heparin, Lovenox, or any other blood thinner).
- You are allergic to any medications or products (e.g., lidocaine, iodine, adhesive tape, latex, or anything else).

You do not need to fast. You do not need someone to accompany you for this test.

After the test

- Do not take a bath for the first 48 hours.
- You may take a shower but try to keep the biopsy site out of the water as much as possible.
- Remove your bandage 48 hours after the test.
- Avoid strenuous physical activity for 24 to 48 hours.

Signs to watch for after the test

Keep an eye on the area where the needle was inserted. Call us if you have any of the following:

- Redness
- Warmth at the biopsy site
- Unusual or increasing pain
- Drainage
- Swelling
- Fever
- Bleeding that does not stop

When will the test results be available?

Talk to your doctor. The sample must be processed in the laboratory and examined under a microscope. It may take a few days before your doctor receives your results.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Canadian Cancer Society
cancer.ca | 1-888-939-3333

Quebec Cancer Foundation
cancerquebec.ca | 1-800-363-0063

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions or complications after the test, please contact your doctor or another member of the care team.

This document is not a substitute for the advice, diagnosis or recommendations of your health professional.

This document was adapted and enhanced using resources produced by the CISSS de la Montérégie-Centre (2019) and the Centre de littératie en santé du CHUM (2023).

F113

This document is protected under Creative Commons (CC) license.