

WHAT IS A BIOPSY IN DOGS?

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A biopsy is the surgical removal of a portion of tissue.

WHAT ARE THE INDICATIONS FOR PERFORMING A BIOPSY?

Biopsies are taken of suspicious masses, tumors or abnormal organs. The biopsy is typically submitted to a veterinary pathologist for evaluation and a diagnosis.

WHAT PREOPERATIVE EXAMINATIONS OR TESTS ARE NEEDED BEFORE A BIOPSY?

Preoperative tests depend in part on the age and general health of the animal as well as the reason for the biopsy. For small superficial skin biopsies, simple blood tests, such as a packed cell volume or blood count, may be done prior to anesthesia. If the biopsy is associated with major organs, extensive tests such as radiographs, blood count, serum biochemical tests, a urinalysis, and possibly an EKG may be necessary.

WHAT TYPE OF ANESTHESIA IS NEEDED FOR A BIOPSY?

A local anesthetic is usually sufficient for small, superficial skin biopsies; general anesthesia is necessary for large biopsies or biopsies of organs to induce complete unconsciousness and relaxation. In this case, the pet will receive a pre-anesthetic sedative-analgesic drug to help him relax, a brief intravenous anesthetic to allow placement of a breathing tube in the windpipe, and subsequently inhalation (gas) anesthesia in oxygen during the actual surgery.

How Is the Biopsy Done?

For skin biopsies, the hair surrounding the biopsy site is clipped. The area is scrubbed with surgical soap and disinfectants. Using a scalpel blade, special biopsy punch or biopsy needle, a section of the suspicious tissue is removed. The skin is then closed with sutures (stitches) or surgical glue. For biopsies of internal organs, following anesthesia, the pet is placed on a surgical table, lying on his back. The hair is clipped over the middle of the abdomen and the skin is scrubbed with surgical soap to disinfect the area. A sterile drape is placed over the surgical site. A scalpel is used to incise the skin at the middle of the abdomen, and then the abdominal cavity is opened. The organ to be biopsied is identified and the biopsy taken. If necessary, the biopsy site is closed with sutures (stitches) that dissolve over time. The abdominal incision is then closed with one or two layers of self-dissolving sutures (stitches). The outer layer of skin is closed with sutures or surgical staples; these need to be removed in about 10 to 14 days.

HOW LONG DOES THE BIOPSY TAKE TO PERFORM?

The procedure takes about 15 minutes to an hour to perform in most cases, including the needed time for preparation and anesthesia. In small skin biopsies, the procedure is relatively quick; in large biopsies or biopsies of abdominal organs, the procedure can take longer.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS OF A BIOPSY?

The overall risk of this surgery is low, especially in those situations where local anesthesia is used. The major risks accompany large biopsies and biopsies of organs and are those of general anesthesia, bleeding (hemorrhage), postoperative infection and wound breakdown (dehiscence) over the biopsy site. Overall complication rate is low, but serious complications can result in death or the need for additional surgery.

WHAT IS THE TYPICAL POSTOPERATIVE AFTERCARE FOR A BIOPSY?

Post-operative medication should be given to relieve pain, which is judged in most cases to be mild to moderate and can be adequately controlled with safe and effective pain medicines. The home care requires reduced activity until the stitches are removed in 10 to 14 days. The biopsy site or abdominal suture line should be inspected daily by the pet owner for signs of redness, discharge, swelling, or pain.

HOW LONG IS THE HOSPITAL STAY FOLLOWING A BIOPSY?

The typical stay for small and minor biopsies is brief. The pet is usually sent home as soon as the biopsy is taken. For extensive biopsies and those associated with internal organs, hospital stays vary depending on overall health of the pet.