Dear Madam/Sir:

In order to be thoroughly informed about this exam that has been proposed to you, we ask you to read carefully the content of this flyer. Should you need any further explanation, please do not hesitate to contact your treating physician.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE A LIVER BIOPSY

© 2006
c/o Services de Gastroentérologie et d’hépatologie et de Pathologie clinique
Hôpitaux Universitaires
24 rue Micheli-du-Crest
1211 Genève 14
Switzerland
www.sevhep.ch

Produced by
FBCommunication - Modena (Italy)
www.fbcommunication.org
The liver biopsy is currently the procedure of choice to identify the cause, to evaluate the prognosis (for example, by assessing the stage of fibrosis), and to decide on the treatment for several diseases of the liver. This exam is often necessary prior to prescribing antiviral therapy (as in the case of hepatitis C) or to justify the deferral from therapy (as in the case of "innocent" disease, or when the disease is not advanced).

The day of the biopsy you should fast for at least 6 hours. It is necessary to avoid drugs that may alter blood clotting, such as aspirin and other anti-inflammatory agents, during the 10 days preceding the exam. It is, however, important to continue all other ongoing treatments (eg, treatment for arterial hypertension). If in doubt, it is better to ask your doctor before making a decision.

It is also recommended, before undergoing the liver biopsy, that you empty your bladder.

You will remain at the hospital the entire day of the biopsy (ie, from the morning until the late afternoon). Prior to the biopsy, the doctor will perform an ultrasound of your liver, and a blood sample will be taken to check your coagulation parameters. If needed, the doctor will prescribe a tranquilizer or a painkiller. Local anesthesia will be given through an injection under the skin. The liver biopsy is carried out while you are lying on your back and consists of taking a small fragment of your liver, which passes through the skin (where the anesthesia has been administered) using a disposable needle. This has a diameter between 1 and 2 mm.

After the biopsy, you will remain in bed for 6 hours, the first hour of which will be spent on your right side. A nurse will check your heartbeat and blood pressure on a regular basis. The biopsy will not leave a scar, and the bandage can be removed the very next day. Soon after the exam, you may feel some pain near the point of the biopsy, or at the right shoulder. In this case, inform the attending nurse and ask for a painkiller. Patients who go home late in the afternoon should not stay – at least for the first night – too far from the hospital (generally, no more than 20 minutes by car). Furthermore, it is advised to be accompanied by an adult and to avoid any major physical activity after the biopsy. During the following week, it is recommended to refrain from taking any drug that may alter coagulation, such as aspirin or other anti-inflammatory agents. You may return to your daily activities, but it is better to avoid major physical efforts or travel to countries where there are no suitable medical facilities for at least one week.

Every medical procedure, even if performed according to updated scientific knowledge, safety procedures, and laws and regulations, presents some risk of complications. Complications following liver biopsy are, however, rare. The most common complication is bleeding, the frequency of which is less than 1 out of 1,000 exams. Other complications are possible, but they represent an exception: sometimes they result from past surgical interventions or specific diseases, or from ongoing therapies. These complications mostly occur during the 6 hours that follow the liver biopsy, hence the need to remain at the hospital during this period. In addition, during the days following the procedure, you may experience abdominal pain, fatigue, pale skin, or fever. Should this be the case, please do not hesitate to contact the doctor who performed the liver biopsy or your treating physician. If this is not possible, please go to the nearest emergency room.