

# SOFT TISSUE BIOPSY



American College of  
Foot and Ankle Surgeons

## What is a Soft Tissue Biopsy?

A soft tissue biopsy is the removal and microscopic examination of a small sample of soft tissue for diagnostic purposes. "Soft tissue" includes the skin, fat, muscle, and tendons that surround, connect, or support other tissues or organs.

Soft tissue biopsies require little time or involvement from the patient. They enable the foot and ankle surgeon to reach an accurate diagnosis and determine the best treatment for the specific condition.

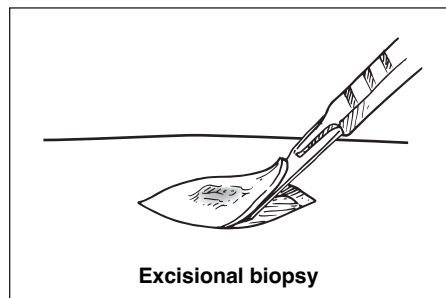
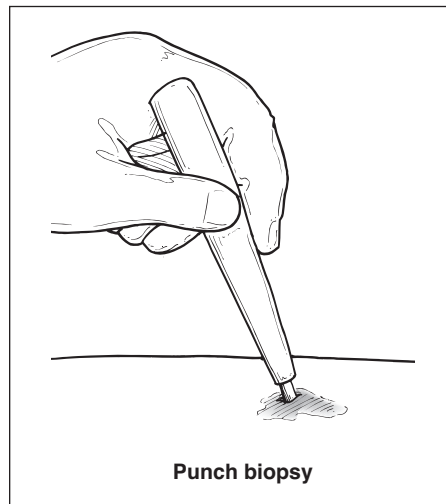
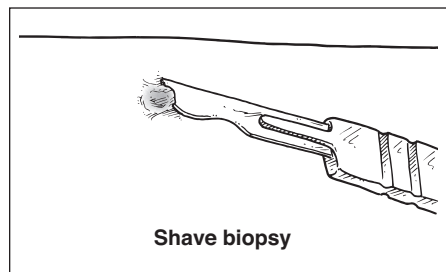
## Conditions Identified by Soft Tissue Biopsies

A wide variety of medical conditions can be identified through a soft tissue biopsy. Some people think the word "biopsy" means that cancer is always suspected, but this is not true. In fact, premalignant or malignant conditions account for only a small percentage of the diagnoses made from soft tissue biopsies.

A few examples of conditions assessed through soft tissue biopsies include:

- Freckles (macules)
- Benign pigmented, or colored, spots (moles or nevus)
- Fungal or bacterial infections
- Rashes (such as eczema or dermatitis)
- Lesions related to a disease affecting the entire body (such as diabetes)
- Nodular conditions (such as a ganglion cyst, lipoma, or fibroma)

- Toenail conditions (onychomycosis, psoriasis)
- Wart-like growths on the skin (benign keratoses)
- Premalignant conditions (actinic and seborrheic keratoses)
- Malignant conditions (skin cancer)



## What Does the Biopsy Involve?

A biopsy involves removal of a small piece of tissue, and takes just a few minutes. The procedure performed will depend on the tissue to be sampled. After numbing the area, the surgeon performs one of the following:

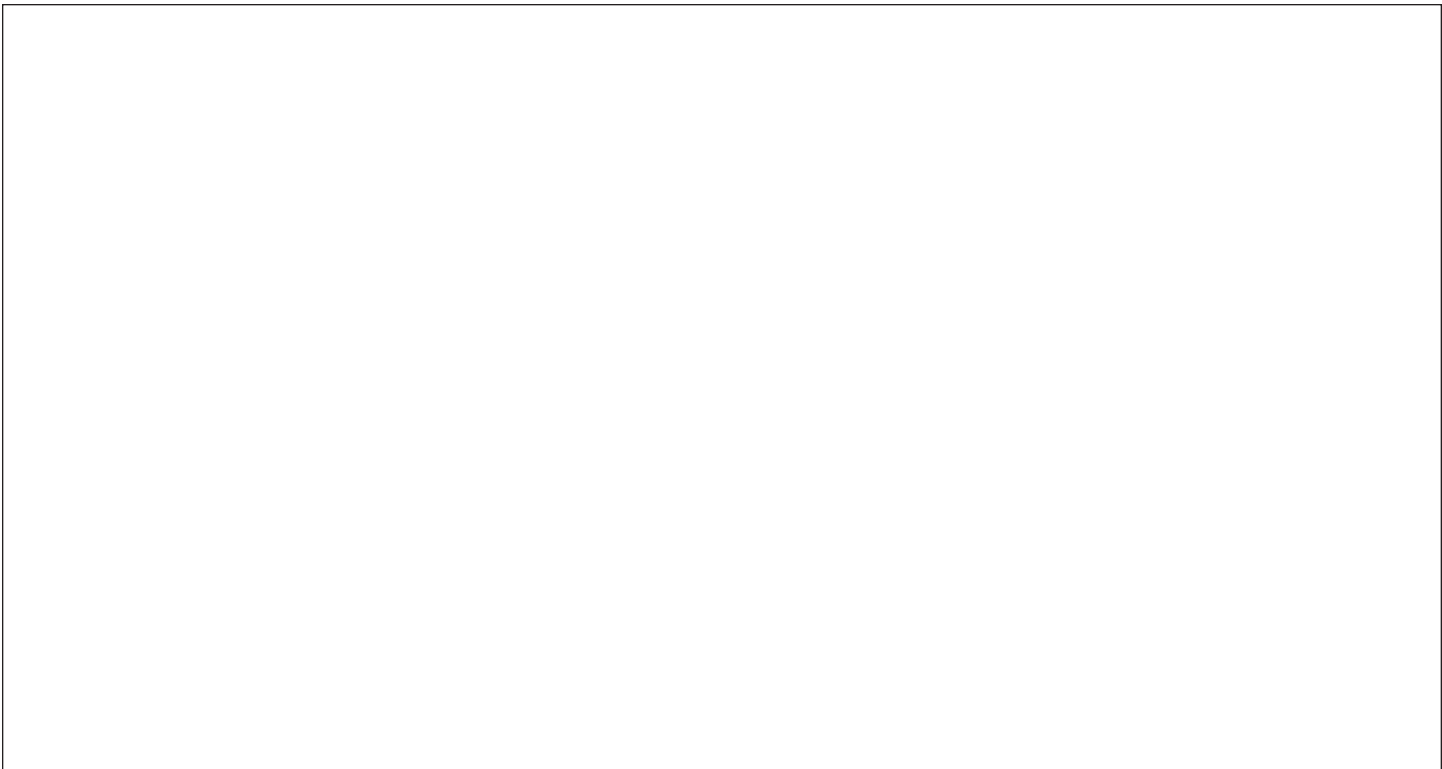
- **Shave biopsy.** A thin piece of tissue is shaved off.
- **Punch biopsy.** A small, round instrument removes a tiny core of tissue. Stitches may be needed.
- **Incisional or excisional biopsy.** A piece, or the entire lesion, is removed. Stitches are often needed.

Once the sample is obtained, the surgeon sends it to a clinical laboratory so that the condition can be identified. The specimen will be examined by a pathologist who specializes in evaluating soft tissue biopsies.

## After the Biopsy

Patients should follow the instructions provided by the surgeon for care of the biopsy site. If the area has stitches, an appointment will be scheduled for their removal.

It usually takes several days for the lab results to arrive at the surgeon's office. If the patient has not heard about the results after 10 days, the surgeon's office should be contacted. Biopsy results, as well as additional treatment that may be required, will then be discussed. ▲



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This information has been prepared by the Consumer Education Committee of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, a professional society of 6,200 foot and ankle surgeons. Members of the College are Doctors of Podiatric Medicine who have received additional training through surgical residency programs.

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