

What is needle biopsy?

This is where a sample is taken of brain or other tissue using a special needle.

Why is it done ?

To get an answer as to what may be causing you problem. The commonest reasons are to biopsy a tumour or area of brain that looks abnormal on you CT or MRI scan.

Will it always get the answer ?

No! As such a small piece is taken there is a chance the area of concern may be missed. If you have a large lesion it may be different in different parts of the lesion so that the biopsy result may not be totally representative of the lesion as a whole.

Why am I having a needle biopsy and not a Craniotomy ?

This could be for a number of reasons. Your lesion may be too deep in the brain to reach safely with open surgery. You may not be well enough to have a craniotomy. This may be to identify the lesion to see if open surgery is needed or if other treatment can be planned so that you avoid a craniotomy.

How is it done ?

It is usually done by a stereotactic approach (see Stereotaxy) This may be either using a frame fixed to your head with 4 pins or by a frameless approach.

How does the needle get through the skull ?

A small hole is drilled through the skin and the bone.

What are the risks ?

The biggest risk is bleeding either from the site of the biopsy or along the track where the needle has entered the brain. This may cause a stroke or death.

What if I have a bleed from the biopsy ?

We do a CT scan after the biopsy and this usually shows a tiny bit of blood in most cases. This will just resolve. In a very small number of patients they will have a bigger bleed. If this is threatening life or neurological function we would more than likely need to do a craniotomy to drain this if possible.