

# Fine needle aspiration (FNA) and cyst aspiration

This document includes information about fine needle aspiration (FNA) and cyst aspiration.

## What is FNA?

FNA is a quick and simple test which removes a sample of cells from the breast or underarm so they can be examined under a microscope. A doctor will perform the FNA and use a fine needle to take the sample.

We will use ultrasound to find the area that needs examination and guide the needle to the correct position. We may use FNA when the abnormal area can be felt as a lump.

## What are the limitations of FNA?

FNA may not collect enough material for a definite diagnosis. Sometimes, even when we see many cells, the results may not be conclusive.

## What will happen before my FNA?

Before your FNA, we will ask if you:

- Have any allergies
- Have had a reaction to local anaesthetic in the past
- Are currently taking any blood-thinning medications or medications that make you bleed or bruise easily

## What will happen during my FNA?

1. We will explain the FNA process before we begin to make sure you understand what is involved. Please let us know if you have any concerns.
2. We will then ask you to sit upright or lie face down on the ultrasound table.
3. The doctor will use ultrasound to find the area that needs to be sampled.
4. We will clean the skin of your breast or underarm using an antiseptic. In some cases, we will inject a local anaesthetic to numb the area. Then, the doctor will insert a fine needle into the tissue. You may experience minor discomfort during this process.

5. The needle will stay in the tissue for 20–30 seconds, as the doctor gently moves it around to collect cells.
6. The doctor will then remove the needle and apply pressure to the breast to help prevent bruising.
7. We may need to insert the needle into the area more than once to collect enough cells.
8. If required, we will send the samples to a pathologist for examination under a microscope.

## What are the possible side effects of FNA?

Possible side effects of FNA include:

### Bruising and bleeding

Bruising is a relatively common side effect of FNA. It should disappear in a few days. In very rare cases, you may develop a large, deep bruise (haematoma), which is felt as a lump in the breast. This will not require special treatment but can take longer to disappear. You may have some minor bleeding from the needle. This usually stops with compression.

### Pain

Everyone has a different pain tolerance. If you experience pain during the FNA, please tell your doctor. They will stop the test and discuss options with you.

### Fainting

If you have a history of fainting during medical tests, you should tell the doctor before they begin the FNA.

### Infection

Infection in the breast after FNA is very rare.

### Reaction to local anaesthetic

Allergic reactions to local anaesthetic used for FNA are extremely rare.

## What is cyst aspiration?

Cyst aspiration removes fluid from a breast cyst. It is similar to FNA.

Most cysts do not need aspiration. In some cases, we may use aspiration to ease pain caused by large and tender cysts. We may also perform cyst aspiration to take a sample for testing if we are uncertain of a diagnosis.

In some cases, we will send the cyst fluid to a pathologist for examination under a microscope. Your doctor will tell you if we need to send your sample for examination.

## What should I do when I get home?

When you get home, you may wish to take some over-the-counter pain medication such as paracetamol. An ice pack may also reduce discomfort from any pain or bruising.

You should avoid strenuous exercise and heavy lifting for 24 hours after the FNA to minimise bruising and discomfort.

## When will I get my results?

Results from FNA or cyst aspiration (if samples were sent for examination) may take up to 1 week. After your test, we will book a follow-up appointment to discuss your results with you.

## When should I contact you?

If you have any concerns after your FNA or cyst aspiration, please contact BreastScreen Victoria or your doctor. For problems after business hours, you may wish to go to the Emergency Department at your closest hospital. We encourage you to seek medical advice if you have:

- Bleeding that doesn't stop with compression
- A red, swollen or tender breast



**If you have chest pain or shortness of breath in the 24 hours following your FNA or cyst aspiration, you should go to the Emergency Department at your closest hospital immediately.**

**Assessment clinic address:**

**Next appointment:**

Date:

Time:

Book at  
**breastscreen.org.au**  
or call **13 20 50**

TTY **13 36 77** if you have hearing  
or speech difficulties



For more information or to change your details,  
visit **breastscreen.org.au** or call **13 20 50**



For interpreter assistance, call **13 14 50**



Translated information:  
**breastscreen.org.au/translations**



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