

British Thyroid Association Patient Information Leaflet 2: Information for patients being investigated for thyroid lumps

Things you need to know before your hospital appointment

Why have I been referred? You have been found to have a lump in your thyroid gland. Such lumps are common and usually non-cancerous. You have been referred to the hospital for further tests.

What tests will I have? You will have a consultation with a doctor who will ask about your symptoms and then will examine your neck. You may require some blood tests and an ultrasound examination. A biopsy known as fine needle aspiration (FNA), may be necessary. This is similar to a blood test but taken from the lump and usually, no local anaesthetic is required. A very thin needle is inserted into any swelling you may have in your neck and a small amount of fluid is taken out. The cells in the fluid are then analysed under a microscope. The doctor will explain the procedure in detail. If you have any questions do not hesitate to ask the doctor.

The ultrasound and biopsy is usually scheduled for a later date. The doctor will explain this in more detail.

Sometimes the doctor decides that no biopsy is required and if so, the reason for that will be discussed with you during the consultation.

Before you leave the clinic, make sure that the doctor has made it clear to you *when* the result will be available and *how* you will receive that information.

Things you need to know after your biopsy

What symptoms will I have after the biopsy? You may have some discomfort in your neck, especially when you swallow. This will improve quickly. After 24 h you may have a little discomfort, and after 48 h hardly any. You can use simple pain killers such as paracetamol if needed. You may also have some bruising around the area where the needle was inserted. The bruising will clear within about a week. If the lump was mainly due to fluid then it is not unusual for the fluid to collect again over a period of 1 or more weeks. This should not alarm you, unless it is painful and red, in which case you should consult your GP.

When will I find out the result of the biopsy? It takes 1–2 weeks for the lab to examine the biopsy and issue a report. The result will be given to you at your next appointment, or if you have expressed a preference to receive it by letter or telephone, as soon as the result has become available. If you have not been notified after 3 weeks, please phone the consultant's secretary.

What are the possible outcomes of the biopsy? In most cases the biopsy result is benign (no evidence of cancer). Sometimes, the biopsy result is unhelpful, because there were not enough cells in the sample to test, or because it was not possible to decide on the significance of the cells. In such cases, the doctor may recommend repeating the biopsy, or he may advise you to have an operation to remove part of your thyroid. Approximately in one out of twenty cases the biopsy shows that the lump is cancerous.

What happens if the biopsy is benign? A benign result is highly reassuring. Rarely it may have to be repeated.

What happens if the biopsy result is suspicious or cancerous? The doctor will discuss this with you and in most cases you will require a thyroid operation to remove part or all of your thyroid gland.

If you would like further information about thyroid cancer please contact one of the patient organisations listed at the end of this leaflet.

Things you need to know after you have been discharged from the clinic

Your tests have shown no evidence of thyroid cancer, which is highly reassuring. This means that the risk of you developing thyroid cancer in future is remote and no different from anybody else.

Do I need to look out for anything in future? No more than anyone else. There are some symptoms, which should not be ignored if they occur, especially if they are persistent or are getting progressively worse. They include:

- the lump is getting bigger;
- the lump feels harder;
- a new lump develops;
- you develop difficulties swallowing or breathing;
- your voice becomes hoarse.

What should I do if I develop new symptoms? If you develop any new symptoms like those described above, you should let your GP know. In some cases your doctor may be able to reassure you. In other cases you may need to be referred to hospital for additional tests.

For further information about thyroid lumps you may contact the British Thyroid Foundation (address below) for a copy of the BTF leaflet *Thyroid Nodules and Swellings*.

Patient support organisations

The following patient-led organisations provide information and support and the chance to speak to other patients who have been through surgery and treatment for thyroid nodules including thyroid cancer.

British Thyroid Foundation. The British Thyroid Foundation is a charity dedicated to supporting people with all thyroid disorders and helping their families and people around them to understand the condition.

Address: 2nd Floor, 3 Devonshire Place, Harrogate, West Yorkshire GH1 4AA

Tel: 01423 709707/709448

Website: www.btf-thyroid.org

Email: info@btf-thyroid.org

Butterfly Thyroid Cancer Trust. Butterfly Thyroid Cancer Trust is the first registered charity in the UK dedicated solely to the support of people affected by thyroid cancer.

Address: PO Box 205, Rowlands Gill, Tyne & Wear NE39 2WX

Tel: 01207 545469

Website: www.butterfly.org.uk

Email: enquiries@butterfly.org.uk

Thyroid Cancer Support Group – Wales. Supporting thyroid cancer patients and families not only in Wales but nationally and occasionally internationally. The group is funding the first national tissue bank specifically for research into anaplastic thyroid cancer.

Address: ‘Morcote’, Sunlea Crescent, New Inn, Pontypool, Gwent, South Wales NP4 8AD

Tel: 0845 009 2737

Website: www.thyroidsupportwales.co.uk

Email: thyroidgroup@tiscali.co.uk

Association for Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia Disorders – AMEND. AMEND provides information and support to families with multiple endocrine neoplasia (MEN) and associated endocrine tumours, including medullary thyroid cancer.

Address: The Warehouse, Draper Street, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0PG

Tel: 01892 516076

Website: www.amend.org.uk

Email: info@amend.org.se.uk