NATIONAL KIDNEY FOUNDATION®

UNDERSTANDING A KIDNEY BIOPSY

A kidney biopsy is a test in which one or more tiny pieces of your kidney are removed. The kidney samples are then looked at with special microscopes in order to:

- Find signs of damage inside the kidney.
- Confirm the diagnosis of certain kidney diseases.
- Help healthcare professionals predict how fast a disease might progress and which medicines will help.
- See if the kidneys are responding well to treatment.
- See if any medicines are hurting your kidneys.

Before the Biopsy

For 2 weeks before the biopsy, most patients are told to not take over-the-counter pain medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®), or other medicines that may cause the blood to thin and raise the risk of bleeding. For the same reason, you may be told to stop supplements like fish oil and vitamin E.

Blood and urine samples are usually taken before the kidney biopsy to make sure you don't have an infection. Your healthcare professional may also want you to change other medicines before the biopsy. You may be told you should not eat or drink for eight hours before the procedure.

During the Biopsy

A kidney biopsy is usually done in a hospital. An overnight stay may be needed to watch for any problems that may happen after the biopsy. You may be awake with only light sedation or asleep under general anesthesia. You will be lying face down with a pillow under your rib cage. If the biopsy is done on a transplanted kidney, you will be lying on your back.

After the Biopsy

You may need to rest in bed for 12 to 24 hours after the biopsy, as directed by your healthcare professional. Staying still in bed helps to heal the place where the kidney sample was taken and to lower the chance of bleeding.

Your blood pressure and pulse are checked often to look for any signs of bleeding inside your body, or other problems. Blood tests are also done. You may eat and drink fluids after the biopsy. If your blood tests, blood pressure, and pulse are stable, you should be allowed to leave the hospital the next day.

Your healthcare professional will talk to you about physical activity and things to watch for after going home from the hospital. Heavy lifting, strenuous exercise, including contact sports, and sexual intercourse should be avoided for two weeks after the biopsy.

If you have an open biopsy, be sure to ask your healthcare professional for any specific instructions you need to follow afterward.



Types of Biopsies

Percutaneous (needle) biopsy: the kidney is found using ultrasound or x-ray images, or both. Sometimes, an injection of dye into your vein may be needed to help the healthcare professional find important blood vessels and the best site for taking a kidney sample. Once the biopsy site is found, your skin is marked and cleaned where the biopsy needle will be inserted.

You will receive a local anesthetic to numb the area where the biopsy needle enters.
You will be asked to take a deep breath and hold it as the healthcare professional puts in the needle. When the needle pushes through the skin to the kidney, you may feel a "pop" or pressure. It is important to stay still and to hold your breath (about 45 seconds or less).

Sometimes two needles are needed to get enough of the kidney sample for diagnosis. When enough sample is taken, the needle(s) are taken out, and a bandage is placed over the needle puncture site. The entire procedure, from start to finish, usually lasts about one hour.

Open kidney biopsy: some people should not have a percutaneous biopsy because they may have a history of bleeding problems. For them, an open surgery may be done so the surgeon can see the kidney up close and get a good sample to test.

Risks

The risks from a kidney biopsy are very small, but they should be discussed with your healthcare professional. As in other medical and surgical procedures, certain complications may happen even though every effort is taken to prevent them.

A blood transfusion may be needed if serious bleeding occurs. Rarely, surgery may be needed to fix a blood vessel that is damaged during the procedure. Infections are not common, but should one occur, they can be treated with antibiotics.

Results

After the kidney sample is taken, it is sent to specially trained healthcare professionals, called pathologists, who will look at your sample and write a report on the findings. It often takes three to five days to get the full biopsy results. In some cases, you may have a partial or full report within 24 hours or less.



For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation

Toll-free help line: **855.NKF.CARES** or email: **nkfcares@kidney.org**

NATIONAL KIDNEY FOUNDATION®

KIDNEY.ORG

This content is provided for informational use only and is not intended as medical advice or as a substitute for the medical advice of a healthcare professional.

© 2026 National Kidney Foundation, Inc. 441-0528_2608