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Kidney Biopsy

What is a kidney biopsy?

A kidney biopsy is a procedure in which your healthcare provider takes a sample of your kidney to test in a lab.

When is it used?

Reasons for doing this procedure include:

- Your kidney is not working well for unknown reasons.
- You have blood in your urine.
- You may have too much protein in your urine.
- Your healthcare provider may want to diagnose a tumor or an abscess (area of infection) in your kidney.

An alternative would be to choose not to have treatment, recognizing the risks of your condition. You should ask your provider about these choices.

How do I prepare for a kidney biopsy?

Tell your healthcare provider if you have had any allergic reactions to X-ray dye (contrast material). Also tell him or her about any problems you have had with substances that contain iodine, such as seafood or cough syrup.

Follow any instructions your provider may give you. Find someone to drive you home after the procedure.

What happens during the procedure?

You will be given a shot of local anesthetic into the skin. The anesthetic will keep you from feeling pain during the procedure. You may also be given intravenous medicine (a sedative) to help relax you during the procedure. As a result, you may not remember the procedure.

Your healthcare provider will use a scanning technique such as ultrasound or CT scan to see the kidneys. If CT is used, contrast material (X-ray dye) may be given intravenously so your provider can better see the kidney during insertion of the biopsy needle.

Your provider will puncture the skin and guide a needle to the kidney. Because the kidneys move when you breathe, you must hold your breath for 15 to 20 seconds as the needle is inserted into your kidney. Your provider will use the needle to remove a small sample of your kidney. The needle may need to be inserted more than once to get enough sample. The kidney sample is sent to the lab for tests.

What happens after the procedure?

You stay under observation for about 6 hours to make sure there is no continued bleeding. Avoid all heavy activity and do not strain or lift anything the rest of the day and the following day.

Ask your healthcare provider what other steps you should take and when you should come back for a checkup.

It may take a few days to get all of the results of the lab tests.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

The procedure helps your healthcare provider make a more accurate diagnosis, which will help determine the proper treatment. The procedure will also help your provider to predict the probable course or results of a disease.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

- The local anesthetic may not numb the area enough, and you may feel some minor discomfort. Also, in rare cases, you may have an allergic reaction to the drug used in this type of anesthesia.
- The needle may puncture a nearby blood vessel, an organ, or a gland. This could cause it to leak or bleed. Excessive bleeding could require a blood transfusion or surgical intervention to stop the bleeding.
- If the needle crosses a collection of bacteria, it could spread an infection to other areas or to the bloodstream.
- If X-ray dye is given into a vein, you may have an allergic reaction to the dye. The reaction may cause trouble breathing, a drop in blood pressure, unconsciousness, or swelling of the skin. If this happens, you will be treated with medicines to lessen the allergic reaction.

You should ask your healthcare provider how these risks apply to you.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

Call your provider right away if:

- You develop a fever.
- You have severe pain.
- Your urine continues to be bloody or discolored.

Call during office hours if:

- You have questions about the procedure or its result.
- You want to make another appointment.

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