

# Temporal artery biopsy

## What is a temporal artery biopsy?

A temporal artery biopsy is a minor operation to remove a small section of a blood vessel (artery) on the side of the head. The artery is then examined under the microscope to look for inflammation.

## What is the reason for a temporal artery biopsy?

The biopsy is performed to help diagnose temporal arteritis, an inflammatory condition which affects arteries. Temporal arteritis can cause severe vision loss in one or both eyes, and urgent diagnosis and treatment is important. It is more common in older patients, particularly women, and is rare in people under 60 years old.

## How is a temporal artery biopsy performed?

The surgery is usually performed under local anaesthesia with a small incision on the side of the head. A small amount of hair may need to be shaved to access the area for surgery. Once the section of the artery is removed the incision will be sutured. Sutures will either dissolve or need to be removed 7 to 10 days after the operation. See your local doctor for removal of sutures. A dressing will be applied to the skin with a thicker pressure dressing on top to minimise bruising. The procedure usually takes about 45 minutes. Let the doctor know if you are on any blood thinning medication prior to your procedure as this may increase the risk of bleeding.

## What are the complications of temporal artery biopsy?

Complications from a temporal artery biopsy are uncommon. As with all operations, there is a risk of bleeding/bruising, infection or scarring. Fortunately, a scar from the incision is often hidden behind the hairline. On rare occasions there may be complications with healing of the incision.



## What do I need to do after the procedure?

You will receive specific post-operative instructions from the nursing staff after your procedure.

There is often a thick pressure dressing on top of the incision which can be removed the day after the biopsy. The dressing against the skin is usually removed in two days.

Most patients will then apply an antibiotic ointment (such as Chloramphenicol) to the incision three times a day for a week. You will be given a prescription for the antibiotic cream. Panadol may be used for pain relief. It is normal for there to be some bruising and irritation after the procedure.

If you have significant bleeding, redness, swelling or discharge, please contact your doctor. If you have been given steroid treatment prior to the biopsy, please continue this medication unless your doctor advises otherwise.

If you are going to have a follow up at the Eye and Ear, you will be given a clinic appointment for an examination and to get the results of your biopsy. Alternatively, you may need a follow up appointment with your GP or private specialist.

## Things to remember

Inform your surgeon if you are on blood thinners prior to your procedure. Temporal arteritis can result in severe loss of vision which may be prevented by urgent steroid treatment (by mouth or intravenously).

## Contact your GP

- Immediately, if you have a change in your vision.
- If you have bleeding, redness, swelling or discharge from the site of the biopsy.
- If you have not received the results of your biopsy within a week.
- If you are being treated with steroids (as there may be resulting side effects which require management).

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