



OSPIDÉAL SAN SEAMAS
ST JAMES'S HOSPITAL



What to Expect When Visiting the Symptomatic Breast Clinic at St James Hospital: A guide for patients

Please bring this letter and the completed form attached to the clinic with you. Please also bring a list of any medication that you are taking.

At your appointment, a member of the breast care team will discuss your breast care referral and your medical history with you and will then perform a breast examination. To facilitate your breast examination, you will be asked to remove all clothing from the upper body. A chaperone may also be present for the examination. Following your consultation and examination a plan for your care will be explained to you.

What tests might I have?

If you have symptoms and are over 35 years old and have been referred to the symptomatic breast clinic, you may be invited to have a **mammogram**. This is an x-ray of your breasts. You may also need an **ultrasound** scan to target any particular area of the breast or under arm. Ultrasound uses high-frequency sound waves to produce an image of the inside of your breasts. A biopsy or fine needle aspirate of the breast or under arm may also be performed if deemed necessary. Please note you may not have any procedure on the day of your consultation but may be asked to return at a later date for further tests. This will be explained to you on the day.

Mammogram

What is a mammogram? A mammogram is an X-Ray of the breast. The x-Ray is a picture of the inside of your body. It is produced by exposure to a controlled source of x-rays and the image is recorded on special photographic film or on a computer.

A mammogram is a safe procedure. There are some risks involved with x-rays. All risks are relative, and the benefits of the examination have to be taken into account.

It is essential that you tell the radiographer carrying out the mammogram if:

- You have breast implants
- You are pregnant
- You think you might be pregnant

What does the mammogram involve? You will be asked to undress to the waist and put on a gown. Once you are in the x-ray room, each breast will, in turn, be positioned against part of an x-ray machine. Each breast needs to be compressed between the x-ray machine and a flat x-ray plate. A certain amount of pressure is felt briefly. This pressure is important to get good results.

A mammogram is not generally painful but can be uncomfortable. Tenderness in the breasts can sometimes make it more uncomfortable. X-ray views are taken of each breast from different angles.

The radiographer will go behind a screen, but at all times you are in view of the radiographer, and can be heard, should you have a problem. Once in position you will be asked to keep still in order for accurate breast images to be taken. You may hear a slight whirring noise from the x-ray machine. Each mammogram exposure takes only a few seconds. You will be in the x-ray room for approximately 20mins.

Ultrasound

What is a breast ultrasound? An ultrasound scan uses sound waves to build up a picture of the inside of the breast. There are no known risks and it is considered to be very safe. It is a commonly used way of getting a picture of the breast.

What does the ultrasound scan involve? You will be asked to undress to the waist and lie down on a couch. The radiologist or sonographer will ask you about your breast symptoms. Once you are lying down your breasts will be examined to check the position of any lumps/areas of concern. A gel will be applied to your breasts and a small hand-held sensor will be moved over the skin to view the breast from different angles. The lights in the room will be dimmed, so that the pictures on the monitor can be seen more clearly. The scan takes approximately 5-10 minutes.

Core Biopsy or Fine Needle Aspiration

Commonly the radiologist may perform one of two tests in order to obtain a sample of the tissue/cells from your breast or underarm area.

- A core biopsy is when a needle is inserted into your breast or underarm to get a sample of the tissue. Local anaesthetic is used prior to the insertion of the needle to numb the area and reduce the pain.
- A fine needle aspiration (FNA) is when some fluid or cells are removed from breast or underarm tissue through a smaller needle.

Ultrasounds or mammography equipment may be used to assist the radiographer in obtaining the tissue/cells. It is important that you inform the doctor of any allergies you may have or if you are on blood thinning/anticoagulation medicine.

The cells or tissue obtained from the biopsy or aspirate are sent to the laboratory and examined under a microscope.

Will the biopsy hurt? The biopsy can be sore. However, a local anaesthetic is given and the procedure only takes a few minutes. Occasionally there may be a little bleeding or bruising. You will be given aftercare advice on the day of your procedure.

When are the results available?

The results of a core biopsy or fine needle aspiration will not be available to you on your first visit as they will need to be analysed in the laboratory. Staff will process your tests as quickly as possible. Everyone in the clinic is aware that this can be a worrying and stressful time. Your biopsy results are then discussed at a multidisciplinary meeting where your symptoms, breast imaging and biopsy are reviewed. The process of analysing and reviewing the samples takes approximately 7-10 days. You will be offered an appointment to attend for the results in person or in certain circumstances you may be called by the breast care nurse. If you are returning to the clinic after your investigations for urgent biopsy results, we would recommend you bring a relative or friend. All results are also sent to your GP by post in due course.