A vulvar biopsy is performed to diagnose lesions of the vulvar skin. For small lesions, a vulvar biopsy may remove and treat the entire lesion. The procedure will be performed easily, safely, and comfortably in the office setting.

Patient complaints regarding vulvar lesions and skin changes may often be diagnosed through history and physical examination, as well as microscopic examination and culture. If these methods are insufficient for adequately assessing the problem, a sample of skin tissue is needed to send for pathologic testing.

The risks of vulvar biopsy include bleeding, infection, scarring, inadequate sample possibly requiring another biopsy procedure, or an allergic reaction to anything that may be used during the procedure.

The area of skin to be biopsied will be injected with a local anesthetic. For most patients, this is the only painful part of the procedure.

The biopsy may be performed using a Keyes punch biopsy or scalpel or scissors. Choice of instrument is generally determined by the type and location of the lesion and by provider preference. We generally use a punch biopsy for flat or slightly raised lesions, and scalpel or scissors for raised or protruding lesions.

Bleeding can usually be stopped with time and pressure for small sites, but typically a chemical agent like silver nitrate is used. Punch biopsies rarely require suturing; however, if the bleeding cannot be stopped within a few minutes, sutures may be used. Most vulvar biopsies are not covered with a dressing. For most cases a pad or pantyliner will be ok.

For punch biopsy sites, the area should be washed or soak in a tub once-twice daily. Soaking is particularly important after bowel movement if the biopsy site is potentially contaminated with stool. The biopsy site should be kept clean and dry. Applying an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables covered with a paper towel to the area can help with pain and swelling. If bleeding occurs, it can generally be stopped by direct pressure by you. It will generally take approximately 5 days for healing.

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