



# Temporal Artery Biopsy

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This material will help you understand the basics of temporal artery biopsy and help you prepare for the procedure.

## **What is a temporal artery biopsy?**

Your doctor thinks you might have giant cell arteritis (GCA), which is also known as temporal arteritis. Temporal artery biopsy is the best way to confirm a diagnosis of GCA. Temporal artery biopsy is an outpatient procedure that involves removing a small section of the temporal artery. The temporal artery is a blood vessel in the scalp on the side of the head. After the procedure, the piece of removed artery will be examined in a lab. The lab will look for inflammation and abnormally large cells.

## **What should I expect before my procedure?**

You may take your usual medications and eat prior to the procedure. Your doctor will notify you about any special preparations. Be sure to follow your doctor's instructions. Let your doctor know if you have any questions.

## **What should I expect on the day of my procedure?**

On the day of your procedure, you will arrive at the Kellogg Eye Center and go to the Neuro-ophthalmology clinic on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. A small area of your hair may be cut short to expose your skin. After that, the doctor will use a machine that listens to the pulse of the

temporal artery. The doctor will use the pulse to mark the skin and determine where to make the incision. The doctor will then clean the skin and use a needle to inject a local anesthetic. This will numb the site and help lessen any pain during the procedure. Drapes will be used to cover part of your head and create a sterile field for the procedure. After that, your doctor will make an incision over the artery that is about 4 cm long. Next, he/she will remove at least 2 cm of the artery and close off the artery on both sides. Finally, the doctor will close with the wound with surgical staples or sutures. Antibiotic ointment will be placed over the wound, but it will not be bandaged.

### **What should I expect after the procedure?**

After the procedure, your doctor will make sure you meet discharge criteria. Once you have been cleared, you can go home. Most people leave immediately after the procedure is over. Any pain or discomfort from the procedure can be treated with Tylenol or ibuprofen. You may not get the wound wet for 3 days. Be sure to avoid the area when washing your hair. You will need to apply a thin layer of antibiotic ointment such as Neosporin, 3 times per day for 7 days. If the incision becomes itchy, be careful not to scratch the area. Call your doctor if you notice any bleeding or other problems at the incision site. You will find out the results of the biopsy in 3-5 days.

## **What will happen if the biopsy shows I have GCA?**

If the biopsy confirms that you have GCA, your doctor will discuss the treatment plan with you. If you were started on corticosteroids before the biopsy, do not stop them until instructed by your doctor.

## **What will happen if my test results are normal?**

If your biopsy results are normal, your doctor will decide the next steps for you to take. If your symptoms strongly suggest you have GCA, your doctor may still treat you with corticosteroids. This is because it is possible to have GCA, but have a normal biopsy. Your doctor may have you do another biopsy or additional tests to determine your diagnosis. If you were started on corticosteroids before the biopsy, do not stop them until instructed by your doctor.

## **Are there complications after having a temporal artery biopsy?**

Complications from temporal artery biopsy are uncommon. Possible complications include:

- Bleeding
- Infection at the surgical site
- Scalp necrosis (tissue death)
- Facial nerve injury
- Scar
- Non-diagnostic biopsy

**For more information, scan this code with your smartphone  
or visit the website listed.**



<http://www.uptodate.com/contents/temporal-artery-biopsy-technique>

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