



THE ENDOCRINOLOGY GROUP, PLLC

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Fine Needle Aspiration (FNA) Biopsy of the Thyroid

Questions and Answers

The most common method for evaluation of a suspicious thyroid nodule is a technique known as fine needle aspiration, or FNA.

In an FNA, a very fine, thin needle (thinner than the needle used for blood draws) is inserted into the thyroid, and aspirates (or “suctions”) cells and/or fluid from a thyroid nodule or mass into the needle. The sample obtained can then be evaluated for the presence of cancerous cells.

Who Should Perform an FNA?

Typically, FNAs are done by endocrinologists, cytopathologists, or surgeons. The cells are studied and assessed by a cytopathologist.

Where is an FNA Performed?

Many FNAs are performed in a doctor’s office, although some might be done as outpatient surgery.

What is an Ultrasound-Guided FNA?

When a nodule is palpable – meaning, you can feel it with your hand – most practitioners don’t need to use ultrasound to guide the FNA process.

Some nodules are very low lying or can only be felt when you are swallowing, or can’t be felt but were picked up by ultrasound, cat scan or MRI. In these cases, a practitioner may use ultrasound to ensure that the FNA is accurately performed.

Is FNA Risky?

Thyroid FNA is generally considered safe. The complication rate is very low.

What Can You Expect During Your FNA?

You will be asked to lie down on the examining table. You'll be asked not to swallow, talk, or move while the aspirations are taking place.

The needle used for the FNA is fairly small and fine.

The entire procedure shouldn't take more than ten to twenty minutes. Most practitioners perform two to four aspirations on every nodule of concern.

You may be advised to apply pressure to the area for approximately 20 minutes after the aspiration in order to minimize bruising or swelling.

Will It Hurt?

That will depend on your own perceptions of pain. Some physicians will use lidocaine, a local anesthetic, to numb the injection site. Some patients complain that this can hurt more than the actual FNA procedure. Other physicians will use ice to numb the local area. Still other physicians will use nothing at all.

How Will It Feel Afterwards?

You might have slight pain with some swelling and bruising at the injection locations, and possibly slight discomfort in swallowing. Ask your doctor about recommendations regarding post-FNA pain medication – many recommend taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen as directed to minimize any residual discomfort.

Can You Go Back to Work

Most people are comfortable enough to go back to work the same day after having an FNA.

What Should I Do to Prepare for my FNA?

If you are on blood thinners, such as aspirin, plavix, Coumadin, lovenox, please discuss with your prescribing doctor what needs to be done. Best to avoid turtleneck shirts and avoid applying makeup/perfumes/lotions to the neck area.