

Patient advice sheet

Vacuum Assisted Excision (VAE)

What is Vacuum assisted excision (VAE)?

Vacuum-assisted excision (VAE) is a non-surgical procedure used to obtain larger samples of breast tissue than those obtained from a standard breast biopsy. This is either from areas of the breast that need more breast tissue for analysis or to remove benign (non-cancerous) lumps in the breast. VAE is a minimally invasive procedure that does not require admission to hospital or a general anaesthetic, as was necessary in the past. A specialist needle is inserted into the breast and a combination of cutting and sucking is used to remove the required breast tissue.

Do I need to do anything before the procedure?

Prior to the procedure it is important that you tell us if you have any allergies, especially to medicines or metal, or if you are having any treatment or take any medicine to thin your blood. Otherwise, no special preparation is required. You can eat and drink normally. Please bring a list of your medication with you and make sure you take any regular medication as usual. You will find it better to wear a separate top with a skirt or trousers. After the procedure we recommend that you wear a non-wired supportive bra.

What happens during the procedure?

When you arrive, the clinician, either a Radiologist or an Advanced Practitioner, will explain the procedure to you and ask for your written consent to proceed. The procedure may be done with you either sitting up or lying down using either the x-ray machine or ultrasound to locate the area of breast tissue that needs to be removed. Local anaesthetic will be used to numb the area, and this may sting a little as it is being injected.

A needle attached to a suction device is then placed into the numbed area and small amounts of breast tissue are taken and sucked away through the needle. This is repeated until the clinician has taken the required amount of tissue. The clinician uses ultrasound images or serial mammograms to monitor the process.

At the end of the procedure, we may want to place a tiny titanium marker in the breast tissue to show from where the tissue has been taken. This will remain in your breast and you will not be able to feel it. This marker will be seen on any future breast ultrasound scans or mammograms. If you require surgical excision of the area following analysis of the sample, this marker will be taken out with the breast tissue that is removed. The titanium marker is MRI compatible and will not cause any problem if you should ever need an MRI scan.

What happens at the end of the procedure?

Once the procedure is completed a member of the team will press firmly over the area for 10–15 minutes to minimise any bruising. The small cut will be closed with slim adhesive strips which should be left on and kept dry for 2-3 days.

You will need to stay in the breast unit for 30 – 60 minutes after the dressing has been applied. This is to check before you go home that we are happy there is no bleeding at the procedure site.

What might I expect after the procedure?

Bruising is common after this procedure and may make your breast feel lumpy. Occasionally, there can be severe bruising which may affect most of the breast and take several weeks to resolve.

Occasionally the procedure site can start to bleed again after you have left the breast unit. If this happens apply firm pressure over the area for 20 minutes. You should contact the breast unit on 01494 323300, your GP or Accident and Emergency if the bleeding does not stop – please take this leaflet with you so they know what procedure you have had done.

Any aching or tenderness should be relieved by taking a painkiller such as paracetamol. Avoid taking aspirin or ibuprofen for the first 24 hours as these have been shown to increase any bruising and swelling. You should avoid heavy lifting or exercise for 48 hours to reduce the risk of complications. Some people experience breast discomfort for several months after this procedure.

When will I get the result?

Before you leave the breast unit we will arrange an appointment for you to get the results, normally within 2 weeks of the procedure.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. Please follow our infection prevention and control guidelines when visiting our healthcare sites. Further information is available on our website.

Patient Advice Sheet

If you would like a copy of this information on audiotape, in large print or translated, please call the Patient Advice Liaison Service on 01296 831120 or email bht.pals@nhs.net