What is a VATS Lung Biopsy?

Your doctor may see nodules on an x-ray or CT scan of your lungs. The nodules could mean cancer, infection, or something else. In order to figure out what the nodule is, the doctor will need a sample of the nodule. There are two common ways to do this. A radiologist can get the nodule tissue by putting a needle into the nodule while using a CT scan to guide him.

If the doctor needs more tissue, he or she may do surgery to get the biopsy. Video-assisted thoracoscopic surgery (VATS) is the best way to get this tissue.

A couple of small cuts will be made in your chest and a larger piece of lung tissue can be removed. In order for your doctor to see what he is doing, a small camera is inserted into one of the cuts.
What to Expect?

- Before the surgery, tell your doctor about all medicines you are taking. He may ask you to stop taking them a couple of days before the surgery.
- You should not eat or drink anything for 8 hours before the surgery.
- Come to the hospital a couple of hours before the surgery so that you can change into a gown and allow the medical team to help prepare you.
- They will take you to the operating room, and then the anesthesia team will put you to sleep. They will also put a tube in your throat to help with your breathing.
- The surgeon will clean your chest and make three or four small cuts (incisions).
- The surgeon will then put a small camera in your chest. By looking through the camera, the surgeon can find the lung nodule and use a stapler to remove the nodule tissue.
- After the surgery, the doctor will put a drain in your lung. This will help remove any extra air or fluid that might have gotten into your lung.
- You will spend a couple of days in the hospital so that the medical team can watch you and make sure you’re not experiencing pain.

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Understanding the Results

Pathologists are doctors who specialize in identifying diseases. They use a microscope to look at tissue samples taken during your biopsy. The pathologist will be able to tell if the nodule is cancer, infection, or something else.

You may go home before you get the report from the pathologist. Your doctor will let you know the results. If the nodule is cancer your doctor may send you to a cancer specialist (oncologist). You might need more surgery. If the nodule is something else, your doctor may send you to a lung specialist (pulmonologist) or help you himself.

What Are the Risks?

Although the VAT surgery is able to get more tissue than other biopsies and helps the doctor make a better diagnosis, there are some risks:

1. Sometimes, you might get a small infection or there will be a little bleeding where the cuts were made. Medicine and/or time will heal these.

2. Usually the doctor can take out the drain in your lung before you go home, but sometimes you need to have the drain in for a couple of days at home. When you visit the doctor for your checkup, he or she will remove it.

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