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Registration:

Patients must have MGH registration numbers; ask unregistered patients to call +1-866-211-6588 to obtain an MGH medical record number. There is no cost to register and obtain a medical record number.

Referring physicians must submit the form on Page 3 if they wish to be sent Pathology reports.

Performing skin biopsy for diagnosing small-fiber polyneuropathy:

- A. The site is 10 cm above the lateral malleolus (less for children), from the more-affected leg. The distal thigh can be biopsied as a second site, 20 cm below the iliac spine. Skin innervation density varies with location so standard sites must be used to get accurate results.
- B. For anesthesia, inject about 1 cc of lidocaine w/epinephrine 1:100,000, using a tiny gauge needle, eg an insulin syringe. To reduce pain, buffer this with up to 10% bicarbonate solution. It is critical to inject below the skin (subcutaneous), not into the skin (intra-dermal), which damages skin cells and renders the biopsy unusable.
- C. Perform a 3 mm biopsy (2 mm for small children) using a standard sterile skin biopsy punch. Place this on the skin and twirl it gently without applying pressure until you penetrate the full skin thickness and have loss of resistance. Pressure will stretch the skin and yield a too-small biopsy that will generate inaccurate results.
- D. To remove the biopsy, grip the subcutaneous fat with a sterile forceps and sever it with a sterile scissor or scalpel. Never touch or pinch the skin itself during removal or the cells will be crushed which makes the biopsy uninterpretable.
- D. Immediately place the biopsy into the vial of Zamboni fixative. Make sure that the biopsy is submerged and then tighten the vial cap completely. Use a Sharpie or other permanent ink to label the vial with the patient's name, date of birth, and biopsy site.
- E. A nearby biopsy can be taken and placed in a separate vial of 8% formalin if routine dermatopathology is requested as well.

Handing and shipping skin biopsy:

Fill out the Page 2 requisition form and place it and the biopsy in a sealed plastic specimen transport plastic bag. Pack the bagged specimen in a foam container containing ice or frozen gel packs to maintain cool temperature.

Do not use dry ice or freeze the specimen at any time as this will render the biopsy uninterpretable.

Tap the container securely and ship it to: Heather Downs
Warren Building room 310
Massachusetts General Hospital
70 Blossom Street Receiving
Boston, MA 0211

The laboratory is open Monday - Friday and specimens cannot be received on a weekend, so please ship the specimen accordingly.

Email to "hdowns@mgh.harvard.edu" to provide the tracking number, number of specimens and arrival date.