

## Patch tests

Dermatology Service  
Litchdon House, Landkey Road, Barnstaple, EX32 9LL.  
Tel: 01271 312850

### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

### What is patch testing?

Patch testing is a specialist procedure that aims to discover if your skin condition is aggravated by a substance that comes into contact with your skin. This is called contact allergy. It does not detect allergies that are related to diet. If a contact allergen is identified you will be given further information about avoiding the substance.

### What does it involve?

Approximately fifty of the substances that are most frequently in contact with your skin and cause allergies will be applied to your back under strips of adhesive tape. These are called chambers. The position of these substances is also marked with tape. The substances include metals, perfumes, preservatives, lanolin, some plants, and leather and rubber chemicals. Further substances may be added if it is felt these may trigger your skin condition.

There are no injections involved in patch testing.

### How long will it take?

You will make two visits to the Dermatology Department on Landkey Road, Barnstaple within a week. Each appointment should take less than an hour. If your job involves a lot of bending and stretching or is very strenuous, it may be advisable not to return to work on the day of the tests as you will need to be especially careful that they don't come off in the first two to three hours after application.

### What preparations are needed?

The doctor may decide not to carry out patch testing if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, if you have a suntan or have had sun exposure in the four weeks before your tests, if you have extensive eczema on your back, or if you are taking steroid tablets. Topical steroid creams and Protopic should be stopped 3 days before the tests.

Please avoid using bath oil or applying cream emollient to your back before your patch tests as this may prevent them from adhering.

Please wear a shirt or blouse that buttons up the front when you come to your first appointment as any stretching to put on a tight fitting top might make your patch tests come off. Don't wear your favourite clothes as they might get stained.

If your back is hairy it would be a good idea to have it shaved or waxed!

## How will I feel afterwards?

The patches will feel quite tight and restrictive, if you stretch too far they may come off. Ask someone to check your back to see that the tapes are secure. If they start to peel off, stick them back down with micropore tape or plasters. If they come off completely, don't try to stick them back on but make a note of what happened.

The patches may feel itchy, this is normal and may be a sign that a reaction is taking place, but if the itching is very severe you may have to remove the chamber and make a note of the chamber that you think caused a reaction.

## What happens after the tests?

**Don't** get your back wet or bath, shower or swim during the week of the tests.

**Don't** do any sport or heavy physical work during patch testing as a lot of movement and perspiration may make the patch tests come off.

**Don't** wear your favourite or pale coloured clothes as the substances or marker pen can stain them. Some of the substances can temporarily stain your skin; this should wash off after a few days.

**Don't** expose your back to the sun or sun-beds before, during or after testing.

**Do** wear something in bed to protect the patches. Clothes that open at the front are easier to take on and off.

**Do** call for advice if you are worried.

**Do** expect some irritation. Sometimes irritation is a sign of a reaction taking place.

## Are there any risks?

Side effects are rare but can include

- *A flare-up* of your eczema elsewhere on your skin. Make sure you have a supply of your usual treatment in case this happens
- *Skin reddening and itching* at the application site – this is a positive result. This will usually disappear within a few days, but a strong positive reaction may cause a blister and sometimes a positive reaction may remain for up to a month
- *Pigment change* – an increase or decrease in pigment may be seen at the site which may last for months or rarely (1 in 1,000) be permanent
- *Infection* – this is rare and would need antibiotic treatment

- *Scarring* – very rare (1 in 10,000)
- *Allergy* – rarely (1 in 5,000) you may become allergic to one of the substances applied in the patch tests. This does not appear to cause problems in the long term.

## Follow up

The chambers containing the substances will need to be removed 48 hours after they are applied, leaving the tapes in place so that, if you do have a positive reaction, it will be able to be identified. Throw the chambers away. You will need to keep your back dry until after the final appointment.

The results of your patch tests will be read 48 hours after the substances have been removed and you and your GP informed of the results. A positive result means that you are allergic to that substance and will need to avoid it in the future. Individual substance advice sheets will be given where appropriate by the doctor. Some reactions can occasionally develop after the results have been read, please contact us if this is the case.

A negative result means you have not reacted to those items applied. However, there are thousands of chemicals in the world to which you may be sensitive but which we cannot identify and test you for.

## Further information

Patch tests are expensive and time-consuming to prepare. It is important that you inform us at least a week in advance if you are unable to keep your appointments. Telephone: **01271 312850**.

If you need advice call the nurse who carries out patch testing on the above number.

The British Association of Dermatologists – [www.bad.org.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?id=113&itemtype=document](http://www.bad.org.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?id=113&itemtype=document)

[www.dermnetz.org/topics/patch-tests](http://www.dermnetz.org/topics/patch-tests)

### PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of the staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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