

Patch Tests (instructions and advice)

What is patch testing?

Patch testing can help your doctor find out whether your skin condition is caused by an allergy to substances which come into contact with your skin, such as products at home, at work or in leisure activities. You can then be advised of the names of any identified allergens in order to help you to avoid them.

About my appointment

Patch testing is carried out in the Dermatology Department at Heavitree Hospital (Gladstone Road, Exeter EX1 2ED). **Patch tests are expensive and time consuming to prepare. It is important that you inform us at least 1 week in advance if you are unable to keep your appointments: 01392 405511.**

During the 24 hours prior to your appointment, please avoid oily baths and do not apply any creams or ointments to your back. This enables the tape to stick more firmly and creams may alter the response to the test substances.

To what will I be tested?

You will be tested to around 50 standard substances which are frequently in contact with the skin, e.g. rubber, preservatives, metals, perfumes and plants, and also additional substances that are suspected triggers for your skin problem. You may be tested to some of your own work or home products, such as personal toiletries.

What should I bring to the patch test clinic?

On the first appointment please bring:

A list of medication - any prescribed drugs you are taking.

All ointments and creams - you use including over the counter creams.

Your own products - items you use at home which you think you might be allergic to e.g. toiletries, cosmetics, nail polish, perfumes and hair care products (bring both the product and the packaging). For other items such as household cleansers, washing powder and fabric softeners, it is only necessary to bring the packaging, which should list the contents. *If you have been particularly asked to bring any product or substance, it is important to remember this.*

Work chemicals - if you think that substances at work may be aggravating or causing your rash, please contact the patch test nurse on **01392 405518** to arrange bringing in samples in well-sealed labelled containers at least 2 weeks before your appointment. At the same time, please also bring in the Health and Safety Data sheets which will be available in your place of work (you may need to speak to the Head of Health and Safety).

What does patch testing involve?

Two to three visits to hospital are required. On the first appointment, typically by telephone, a dermatologist will decide which tests are needed. The substances to be tested will be applied to your back in special small containers contained

within a tape. The containers are identified by marking your back with ink. Occasionally the arms or the thighs are also used. The sites may itch. This is normal. Allow up to 2 hours for this first visit.

The substances remain taped in place for 2 days, then the patches containing them are removed. Marking ink or tape will remain on your back and may need to be reinforced, to ensure it will persist for a further two days.

On the final visit, your back will be examined and any further reactions discussed with you.

It might be necessary to expose part of your arm or back to ultraviolet light if a light-induced contact allergy is suspected (this is called 'photopatch testing').

It is possible that your patch tests will be negative. This is helpful since, as far as we can, we will have eliminated contact allergy as a cause of your skin problem. Positive reactions become red and itchy at the test site and usually become apparent by the third visit (final reading), although they can occasionally take longer, up to two weeks. If you do develop a late reaction, please contact the clinic. Some substances may stain the skin; this is normal and will wash off after a couple of days with showering or bathing.

You may not be patch tested if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, have extensive eczema on your back, have sunburn or have used a sunbed over the previous 2 weeks, or are on a moderate or high dose of steroids (e.g. prednisolone tablets more than 10 mg/day). If any of these apply, please telephone to rearrange your appointment.

Do not:

- Do not get your back wet during the tests (from bathing, swimming, and showering). A cool shallow bath works well.
- Do not wear cherished clothing as the marker ink may stain it permanently.
- Do not expose your back to the sun or artificial sunlight (sun lamps) during this procedure.

Do:

- Do avoid sport or heavy physical work during the week of the tests, as sweating would cause the patches to fall off.
- Do wear an old bra or shirt for the week of the tests and wear a shirt or vest to sleep in order to protect the tests. Clothes that open at the front can be easier to take on and off than those which go over your head.
- If a patch starts to peel off, reinforce with tape such as Micropore or ScanPor. If a whole patch comes loose, remove it and note the time and date.
- Contact the clinic if you are concerned on **01392 405516** or **01392 405518**.

What side effects may occur?

Side effects are rare, but include:

- **Skin reddening and itching at the application site** - from positive test results. This usually disappears after a few days.
- **Persistent reaction** - some positive test reactions, e.g. to gold, may persist for up to a month.
- **Flare of eczema** - a positive patch test may be accompanied by a flare of existing or previous eczema.
- **Pigment change** - an increase or decrease in pigment may be seen at the site of patch tests, which may last for months or rarely be permanent.
- **Infection** - this is rare and would need antibiotic treatment.
- **Scarring** - very rare.
- **Allergy** - very rarely, in about 1 in 500 cases, you may become allergic to one of the substances applied during patch testing. In practice, this does not seem to cause problems in the long term.

Risks

Rarely, you may become sensitised to the products applied. It is unlikely, but you may have an allergic reaction to the test tape or skin pen marker.

Storage of patch test results

For audit purposes, patch test results are often recorded in an anonymised computer database and used to standardise the results of patch testing nationally, in accordance with good medical practice. The anonymised data may be used for research and shared with other centres.

Where can I get more information about patch testing?

<http://dermnetnz.org/procedures/patch-tests.html>

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

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