

Guide to Skin Prick Testing

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What is an allergy?

An allergy develops when the body's immune system overreacts to a substance that is not normally harmful, e.g. grass pollen. In allergic reactions the body produces powerful chemicals such as histamine.

These chemicals cause unpleasant symptoms and can be harmful and cause damage to the body. People can have allergies to almost anything, from animals, bee and wasp stings to grasses or even chocolate. The substances that cause reactions are called allergens.

Symptoms include:

Nose	Urge to sneeze, runny or blocked nose causing breathing difficulty (rhinitis).
Eyes	Itching, reddening, watering, swelling (conjunctivitis).
Respiratory System	Asthma, causing coughing, wheezing and occasionally acute breathing difficulty.
Skin	Nettle rash or eczema may occur on direct skin contact with some inhalant allergens.

What is a skin prick test?

A skin prick test is used to diagnose allergies. The nurse will prick gently through a drop of allergen extract placed on the surface of the arm. If you are allergic to the allergen you will have a small, itchy swelling and a reddening of the skin after 10-15 minutes.

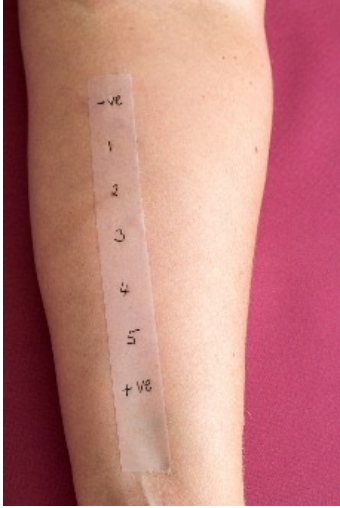
Why am I having a skin prick test done?

Your doctor has decided that you might have an allergy, so you will be asked when your symptoms are most obvious, such as inside the home, outdoors, night time etc. From that information the doctor can choose which allergens you need testing with.

What must I do before the skin prick test?

You should not take any antihistamines or cough medicines for at least three days before attending your skin prick test clinic; this is because these medicines interfere with the body's reaction to the test and could suppress your results.

Performing a skin prick test

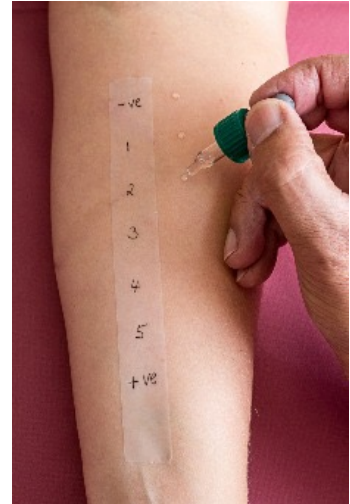


Step 1

The nurse will rest your arm near the edge of a table. Using a skin marking pen, they will mark and code the inside of the forearm, either directly or onto Scotch Magic Tape™ (with + and - for the controls).

Step 2

The nurse will then apply one drop of each allergen solution on to the skin.



Step 3

They will then prick your skin through the drop holding the lancet vertically. A constant pressure will be kept for one second then the lancet will be removed.

Step 4

Your arm will then be blotted dry rather than wiped to avoid cross-contamination between the allergens.



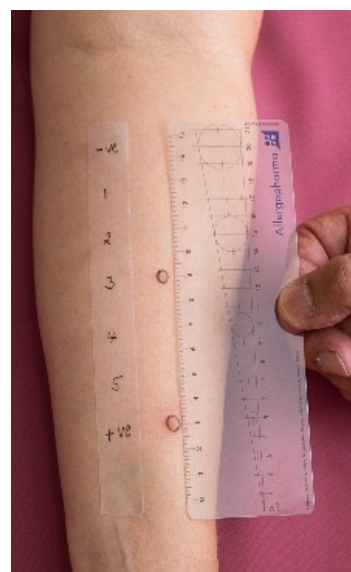
Step 5

You will then be instructed to wait for fifteen - twenty minutes.



Step 6

After the time has elapsed, the nurse will read the reactions. They may draw around each red mark with a skin marker pen and then measure the diameter of each red mark directly.



What can I be allergic to?

There are many different allergens, a few of which are listed below. Please note however that this list is not exhaustive.

Animals

Proteins which are found in animal hair, skin cells, urine and saliva can cause allergic reactions. Common animals causing allergic reactions include cats, dogs, guinea pigs, rabbits, horses and hamsters.

Pollens

Hay fever, is one of the most common allergic diseases and consists of seasonal eye and nasal symptoms. The time of year of the symptoms depends on which trees or grasses you are allergic to.

Moulds

Mould spores can also trigger allergic reactions, whether they be indoor moulds commonly found in bathrooms in damp houses or outdoor moulds found on plants.

House dust mite

If you have symptoms similar to hay fever all year round, it is possible you may have an allergy to the house dustmite. High levels of dust are found in pillows, mattresses, duvets and soft furnishings. Your nurse is very likely to test you for this allergy.

Food

Sometimes you can react to certain foods, be it when consumed or on contact with the skin. Common food allergens include milk and eggs (especially in children), fruit, vegetables, fish, nuts and meat.

What happens after my skin prick test?

The reactions will disappear after two to three hours.

The nurse may apply cream to stop any itchiness caused by the reactions.

You may resume your medication unless the doctor advises otherwise.

The symptoms of allergy can be controlled using medication in the form of tablets, inhalers, creams etc. depending on the location, type and seriousness of symptoms. Remember these medications do not cure the allergy and only provide relief while they are taken or applied.

Your doctor will prescribe the treatment most suitable for you.

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Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/ department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

Trust Values

- Courtesy and respect
- A welcoming and positive attitude
- Polite, friendly and interested in people
- Value and respect people as individuals
So people feel **welcome**
- Attentively kind and helpful
- Look out for dignity, privacy & humanity
- Attentive, responsive & take time to help
- Visible presence of staff to provide care
So people feel **cared for**
- Responsive communication
- Listen to people & answer their questions
- Keep people clearly informed
- Involve people
So people feel **in control**
- Effective and professional
- Safe, knowledgeable and reassuring
- Effective care / services from joined up teams
- Organised and timely, looking to improve
So people feel **safe**



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

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