

Patch Testing Patient Information

Author: Julie Errington, Dermatology Nurse Specialist



James Paget
University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

What is Patch Testing?

Patch testing is a way of finding out if you are sensitive or allergic to one or more substances with which you have come into contact. This is a delayed allergy which produces itching, redness, swelling and sometimes blistering of the skin where symptoms develop over hours and days rather than immediately. The substances used may not always be specific items but elements contained in items used every day such as jewellery, cosmetics, gloves or creams and ointments that you may be using on your skin. Patch testing does not detect allergies related to foods that have been eaten. Depending on the history of where, how and when your skin problems arose the healthcare professional will decide on which group of substances to test for.

How are Patch Tests performed?

No needles are used. Small discs, each containing a different substance, are taped to the back, upper arms or upper legs. The procedure involves three appointments at the hospital and you must be able to attend each one. The first appointment involves applying the discs to the upper back which are then held in place with wide tape which remains in place for 48 hours. The second appointment allows us to remove the discs and examine the skin and record any reactions. Both these appointments will be with a nurse. At the third appointment the final reading is carried out by either the doctor or dermatology nurse. If the skin on your back is showing any positive reactions you will be given an explanation and written information on the substances. If the problem is with your legs further investigation, advice and treatment may be confirmed at this appointment. This can take some time so please be prepared for a longer consultation.

Some important information for Patch Testing

DO: Make sure you can attend all three appointments and let us know if you are unable to attend. Please give us at least two working days notice as there is a great demand for appointments.

DO: Let us know before attending your appointment if you are taking a course of steroid tablets as the test may have to be postponed. Steroid creams/ointments can be used as normal to any area other than the upper back.

DO: Contact us before your appointment if you have any specific substances that you wish to have applied to your skin. Please give us at least three weeks prior to attending your appointment to organise this.

DO: Contact the department if the skin on your back becomes very uncomfortable or sore. Occasionally the reaction can be quite severe producing swelling, weeping and blisters.

DON'T: get your back wet during the whole of the testing period (one week).

DON'T: do any sporting activities or heavy lifting while the discs are in place as this may cause them to move and become mixed up with each other. We wouldn't then be certain which disc may be causing a sensitivity or allergy.

DON'T: apply any creams or moisturisers to your back before your first appointment.

Patients with leg dressings: Please bring with you any treatments such as creams/ointments, dressings, bandages or support stockings being applied and any records of your treatments on the third appointment. **(Please inform your nurse that any treatment to the leg will be performed at the third appointment only.)**

Patients with a hairy back: Please note that as the discs and tapes are stuck to the skin on the upper back this area will need to be shaved. We can dry shave this area at your first appointment however it is better to wet shave the evening before your first appointment.

Clothing: Please be warned that some of the substances applied to your back can leak through the tapes. You are advised to wear an item of clothing taking this into consideration (this may also need to be considered with regards nightwear and bedlinen).

PLEASE NOTE If you are pregnant or think you may be, or are breast feeding when you receive your appointments, please contact the department on the number below.

If you have any further questions please telephone the dermatology department on any of the numbers:

01493 453545, 01493 453602 or 01493 453601 during the hours of 08:30 and 17:15 Monday to Friday.

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: We CARE for...
our patients... each other... ourselves

BEHAVIOURS:

Courtesy and respect

Attentively kind and helpful

Responsive communication

Effective and professional

**#Proud
of the
Paget**



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.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240