

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Short synacthen test

This leaflet aims to answer some of the questions you may have about having a short synacthen test. It explains the purpose of the test and the side effects you may have during the test. This leaflet also explains what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any other questions or concerns, please speak to the nurse caring for you.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your name and date of birth and check your ID band. If you don't have an ID band, we will also ask you to confirm your address. If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check. Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

Consent

We must by law obtain your written consent to any operation and some other procedures beforehand. Staff will explain the risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you to sign a consent form. If you are unsure of any aspect of the treatment proposed, please do not hesitate to speak with a member of staff again.

What is a short synacthen test?

This test is done to assess the function of your adrenal glands.

The adrenal glands are situated on top of both kidneys and are responsible for producing cortisol.

Cortisol is a hormone which is essential for health and is particularly important in stressful situations. The adrenal glands produce cortisol in response to adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), a hormone produced by the pituitary gland.

During this test you receive an injection of synthetic ACTH to stimulate cortisol release from your adrenal glands.

We are then able to assess how much cortisol you can produce by taking blood samples.

Why do I need this test?

This test is necessary to find out if there is an adequate level of cortisol production in response to stimulation. Cortisol is a hormone produced by the adrenal glands and plays an important role in your body's response to stress and illness. Cortisol is also involved in regulating your blood sugar, blood pressure and immune system. Greater amounts of cortisol are produced by your body in times of illness. If your body is unable to produce enough cortisol you may not be able to cope with illness and could become very unwell.

What are the benefits?

This test will allow us to find out if your adrenal glands are able to produce enough cortisol in response to ACTH. The results of this test allow the endocrine team to decide if you require treatment or if you are currently on treatment, whether this should continue.

What are the risks?

A cannula (tiny plastic tube) will be inserted into a vein in your arm or hand using a needle. The cannulation process is like that of a blood test.

Associated risks with cannulation or a blood test may include:

- Multiple punctures to locate veins.
- Bleeding from the puncture site.
- Bruising.
- Haematoma (blood build up under the skin).
- Fainting or feeling lightheaded.
- Infection (a slight risk any time the skin is broken).
- Phlebitis (inflammation of the vein).

Keeping pressure on the puncture site for a few minutes after the needle is removed will help to reduce bruising.

During this test you will be given an injection of synthetic ACTH (synacthen) into your vein. As with any new medication there is a small risk of allergic reaction. In extremely rare cases this medication can cause adrenal bleeding and anaphylaxis (a severe reaction to medication). More commonly you may feel warm, light-headed, or nauseous (feeling sick). These feelings should subside quickly.

Are there any alternatives?

To assess for primary hypoadrenalism there are no alternatives to this test.

Do I need to prepare for my test?

- If you are taking hydrocortisone tablets or any other steroid (for example prednisolone, dexamethasone or budenoside) do not take these tablets on the day of the test.

- On the day before the test do not take any steroid past 9pm.
- Do not use any steroid inhalers or creams on the day of the test or 12 hours before the test. Please bring any steroids to take as normal after the test.
- If you are on oral oestrogens (oral contraceptive pill containing oestrogen or oral HRT) you should stop these six weeks before the test. You may continue using oestrogen gel or patches. Please call to discuss this on 01623 622515, extension 6597, and a message will be passed on to the endocrine nurse specialist.

Apart from the medications mentioned you can continue to take your other regular prescribed medications.

What happens before my test?

Your blood pressure will be taken, and the nurse will ask you about your regular medications and allergies.

What happens during my test?

A cannula (tiny plastic tube) will be inserted into a vein in your arm or hand using a needle from which blood samples will be taken. The nurse will then give the synthetic ACTH (synacthen) through the cannula.

You may have side effects of the synacthen injection, which include flushing, (a warm sensation), nausea (feeling sick), light-headedness, or a metallic taste. These side effects do not last for long and should not be felt by the end of the test. Some people do not have any side effects.

A blood sample will be taken at the start and 30 minutes after the synacthen has been given.

How long does the test take?

The test lasts for 30 minutes from the time the nurse gives you the synacthen. You should expect to be in the unit for one to one and a half hours.

What happens after my test?

Once the test has been completed the cannula will be taken out and you will be able to go home.

If you are taking steroids, continue to take these as before until you hear from the hospital.

Results will be reviewed by the endocrine team or other referring clinician. They will either be sent to you by letter or, in some cases, discussed on the phone or with you at your next clinic appointment. A letter will also be sent to your GP; this may take up to six weeks

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the department. We are open Monday to Friday between 9am and 5.30pm:

- **Clinic 5** – 01623 622515, extension 6578.
- **Patient pathway coordinator** – 01623 622515, extension 6597.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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