

Information on allergy testing

You have got an appointment for allergy tests. These tests will help to establish whether or not you are allergic, and if so, what substances you are allergic to. Please report timely for your appointment at the reception desk in the Dermatology outpatient clinic.

How to prepare for allergy tests

- Stop taking antihistamines (tablets against hay fever or itch) at least 3 days before the test date.
- Do not expose your back to the sun or use a sun bed, at least for 2 weeks before the test date.
- Prior to the examination, please have breakfast or lunch as usual.
- Please bring any cosmetics and medication you are currently using, or you were using before or during the time your skin complaints started, at the test date.
- Please do not use creams or ointments containing corticosteroids on your back, a week before the test date.
- Please contact the Allergy/Occupational Dermatology outpatient clinic (telefoon 020 566 7792) if you have to take corticosteroids (i.e. prednisone or dexamethasone) or any other immunosuppressive medication. Exposure to ultraviolet light and the above mentioned ointments and medication, can influence the test results.
- If there is any possibility that you may be pregnant, please notify us.

The testing procedure

On day 1 you will start with a consultation ('intake') with the specialist. You will be asked in detail about your complaints, including contacts with materials and on circumstances that may be of relevance. Based on the information of your medical history, the test programme will be determined.

In general, two different types of allergy testing have to be performed:

Patch tests (or epicutaneous allergy tests) used to detect contact allergies

Contact allergies can cause allergic contact dermatitis ("eczema") and can occur on direct contact sites or upon airborne or systemic exposure. Patch testing is a very safe way to detect contact sensitization and can also be performed during pregnancy. Patch testing will be conducted on your back. If you are allergic to any of the test materials, small itchy areas of eczema will occur on the respective test sites (a positive reaction). However, sometimes also general skin irritation or itching can occur. Also, your eczema can become worse during testing. It is important to inform the specialist or nursing staff in this case.

- Standard test materials from the "European baseline series". This series contains the most frequently contact allergens.
- Standard test materials from supplementary test series containing certain groups of contact allergens.
- Own contact materials that are suspect in your particular case, taking into account your work, hobbies, skin care products, clothes other types of exposure and the localisation of your complaints. You may be asked to hand in your own materials so that they can be specially prepared for testing.

On day 3 the plasters will be removed from your back, test sites will be marked and skin reactions are recorded for the first time. The marking ink may cause stains: you are therefore advised to wear an old (T-) shirt or vest, to prevent inadvertent staining of your clothes. For certain allergens the plasters have already to be removed on day 2: you will be informed if necessary. Directly before your appointments, please do not lean back against the back of the chair as this can hinder test readings.

On day 4 your back will be re-examined and all test results will be discussed with you. Most likely you will be asked to come for a final examination of your back on the next Monday afternoon. This is necessary since some test materials take longer to develop a positive reaction. In case of new reactions, they will be discussed with you, too.

Your back must stay dry during the test week. The ink markings must stay visible until the last examination. To make sure the patch tests and plasters keep sticking to your back, please avoid activities during which you bend your back a lot or which cause you to sweat heavily. Also, showering is limited to rinsing yourself by holding the shower head in your hand, making sure your back stays dry. If the plasters start to detach (start to curl) you can fix them with an extra piece of tape or plaster.

Skin prick tests (or intracutaneous allergy tests) used to detect immediate type allergies. Immediate type allergies can mainly cause hay fever, airway problems and gastro- intestinal complaints, but can also cause eczema or drug allergy. Usually these test materials are put as droplets directly on the skin of your forearm. A sterile skin prick test needle is used to puncture superficially the skin going through these droplets. Own materials are tested in a similar manner. For certain allergens, superficial scratches in the skin are needed onto which the test materials are applied. Also these tests are hardly painful, but in particular children might be scared. Positive skin test reactions look and feel like mosquito bites. Already after 10-15 minutes reactions will be read.

The prick tests are usually carried out on a Wednesday or a Thursday. During testing you will be asked to stay at the department. If you experience any discomfort or feel strange do not hesitate to contact the (para)medical staff.

Questions?

Allergy/Occupational Dermatology outpatient clinic

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