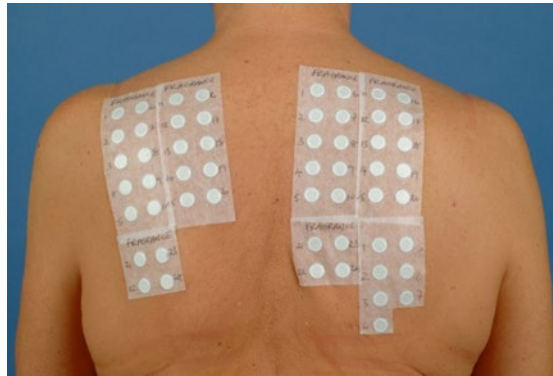


Patch Test Clinic

Information for patients



What is patch testing?

Patch testing is a specialist procedure carried out by Dermatology Doctors and Nurse Specialists to find out whether your skin condition is caused or aggravated by an allergy to substances which have come in to contact with your skin. This is called contact allergy. This type of patch testing is not undertaken to investigate food allergy.

Substances that cause an allergic reaction are called allergens. They can be found at home, at work or in leisure activities.

What will be tested?

There are approximately 50 substances which are most frequently in contact with the skin such as preservatives, metals, perfumes, rubber, leather chemicals and plants among others. Additional substances will be added to this list if it is thought they may trigger your skin condition. You may also be tested to 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.
- A list of ointments and creams you use including those prescribed and those you may have bought yourself.
- Information on products and chemicals used at work - if you think that substances at work may be making your skin condition worse, please bring in the Health and Safety Data sheets (sometimes called the COSHH sheets) of these products. These will be available at your place of work although you may need to speak to the Head of Health and Safety. You may be asked to bring samples of these products for testing, if necessary.

- You may be asked to bring some of your own products in for testing on the Wednesday or Friday appointment. These could be items such as hair, nail, or cosmetic products.

What does patch testing involve?

You will need to attend the hospital for 3 consecutive visits in 1 week. You may also have a telephone appointment the week before you attend the department.

On the first visit, each diluted substance to be tested will be applied to your back in special small chambers (about 1cm in diameter) held in place by hypoallergenic tape. Occasionally the arms are also used to patch test. You should allow up to 2 hours for this first visit.

The substances will remain taped in place until your next visit 2 days later, when the tape is removed. The location of the allergens are identified by marking your back with ink. Please wear an older or dark top as the ink can stain clothing. Additional patches are sometimes added at this visit, and it may be necessary to expose part of your back to ultraviolet light if a reaction to sunlight is suspected. This is called 'photopatch testing'. Any reactions at this stage will be documented. The ink markings will remain on your back for a further 2 days until your final appointment.

Positive reactions become red and itchy where the substance was put on your skin, and usually become obvious by the third visit (final reading), although a reaction can occasionally take up to 2 weeks. If you do develop a late reaction, please contact the department on 0131 536 2063.

On the third visit, your back will be examined by a clinician and any reactions will be discussed with you. Some substances may stain the skin; this is normal and will wash off after a couple of days with showering or bathing.

Often patch tests will be negative, or identify sensitivities that are not relevant to your skin condition. This is still helpful to your health care provider as contact allergy will be ruled out as a cause of your skin problem.

Important instructions

Pregnant women will not be tested. If you are breastfeeding, have extensive eczema on your back, have a suntan, have applied fake tan/self-tanning products, or have used a sunbed in the previous 6 weeks we may be unable to undertake testing. Also, we may not test you if you are on a moderate or high dose of steroid tablets or are taking immunosuppressive drugs, as the test may result in a false negative reaction.

If in doubt or if any of these apply, please telephone the clinic to discuss this or rearrange your appointment on 0131 536 2063.

You must not apply any topical steroid to your back or upper arms for at least 3 days prior to testing. Emollients (moisturisers) should not be applied to your back or upper arms on the day of testing.

If you take antihistamine tablets you do not need to stop taking these unless directed by your healthcare provider. Sometimes we may need to carry out further testing which would require you to stop your antihistamine. We will let you know if this is the case. **If you have a single Friday only appointment you will need to avoid antihistamines. They should ideally be stopped 5 days prior to your appointment, however, if this is not possible they must be stopped 48 hours prior to testing.**

During the test:

- Do not get your back wet. Showering, bathing, or swimming must be avoided during the week of the tests. A cool shallow bath is a good alternative.
- Itching of the test areas is normal, but you are strongly advised not to scratch.
- Do not wear light coloured clothing as the tests and the marker ink may permanently stain it. Wear dark or old clothing.
- Do not expose your back to the sun or artificial sunlight (sun lamps) during testing.
- Do avoid sport or heavy physical work during the week of the tests, as stretching and excessive sweating will 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 to protect the patches. 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, tape the edges down. You will be provided with tape at your first visit. Contact the clinic if you are concerned.

What side effects may occur?

Side effects are rare, but include:

- Skin reddening and itching at the application site (a positive test result) - this usually disappears after a few days. A strongly positive patch test may cause a blister.
- Flare up of eczema - a positive patch test may be accompanied by a flare up of existing or previous eczema. Multiple positive patch tests may be difficult to interpret, and it might be necessary to repeat patch testing when your eczema is better controlled.
- Persistent reaction - some positive test reactions may remain for up to a month before fading away.
- Pigment change - an increase or decrease in skin colour may be seen at the place where the patches are, which may last for months or rarely (1 in 1,000) be permanent.
- Infection - this is rare and would need antibiotic treatment.
- Scarring - very rare (1 in 10,000).
- Allergy - rarely, you may become allergic to one of the substances applied during patch testing (sensitised). In practice, this does not always appear to cause problems in the long term.

Storage of patch test results

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

More information

For more information about patch testing visit the links or scan the QR codes below:

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



British Association of Dermatologists: www.bad.org.uk



Where to find us

Patch Test Clinic,
Dermatology Day Treatment Centre,
Level 3,
Lauriston Building,
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References: Adapted from the British Association of Dermatologists Patch testing patient information leaflet, June 2020.