

Patient information factsheet

Auditory brainstem response (ABR) testing (sedation)

We have written this factsheet to explain what will happen at your child's auditory brainstem response (ABR) testing appointment, so that you know what to expect and can help prepare your child. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

What is an auditory brainstem response (ABR) test?

An ABR test is a non-invasive test that uses electrodes (recording pads that measure brain activity) to measure how well sounds reach your child's brainstem. Your child's brain's response to sound will be measured via waveforms on a computer screen.

The test can only be completed when your child is asleep. This is because there is too much brain activity for us to record the hearing response when they are awake.

Why does my child need this test?

Your child has probably already been to the audiology department for a hearing test, but we were unable to get reliable results using the usual tests. ABR testing is used if a child cannot respond to sounds in a predictable way, such as pushing a button, playing a game or turning their head every time they hear a sound.

If your child is likely to be calm and sleep with the help of a sedative (medication that makes you feel sleepy and relaxes you), we can perform ABR testing on a ward.

Where will the test be performed?

We will perform the test on the John Atwell day ward, which is located on level G in the children's hospital at Southampton General Hospital. We will send you the details of your child's appointment in the post.

What does sedation involve?

The sedation will be a liquid medicine prescribed by a doctor at the hospital and administered by a nurse on the ward. It will take around an hour for the sedation to work so it might be a good idea to bring something that will calm your child during this time, such as a comfort toy or blanket. Please try to avoid letting your child nap on the day of their appointment to help them fall asleep more easily.

Are there any risks?

An ABR test is a safe and painless test.

There are some risks related to sedation. Your child's consultant will discuss these with you before you give your consent.

Patient information factsheet

What happens during the test?

Once your child is asleep, we will attach the sticky pads (electrodes) to their forehead and behind their ears, and set up our equipment to begin testing. We will play sounds at different levels into your child's ear via a soft ear tip or headphone, and record their responses to sound on our computer screen. Once the testing is complete, we will gently remove the sticky pads and pack our equipment away.

How long will the test take?

Testing time may vary depending on how well your child sleeps and how good the recording conditions are. The test usually takes around an hour, but it can take longer. Your child will need to stay on the ward for an hour after the sedative wears off.

When will I receive the results?

We may be able to give you your child's results on the day. If we are unable to, we will give you a ring once we have analysed the results to talk through what we found and arrange any further appointments if necessary.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

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