

Patient information factsheet

Skin contact allergy and patch testing

We have given you this factsheet because your doctor has referred you for patch testing. It explains what patch testing is and what it involves, so you know what to expect at your appointments. We hope it helps to answer some of your questions. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

Important to note

Patch testing is performed in the **dermatology department** at **Royal South Hants Hospital** (E level, Fanshawe Wing, Royal South Hants Hospital, Brintons Terrace, Southampton, Hampshire, SO14 0YG).

What is patch testing?

Patch testing is a specialist test that can help your doctor determine whether your skin condition is caused, or made worse, by an allergy to substances that have come into contact with your skin (known as allergic contact dermatitis). For example:

- cosmetics (such as soaps, creams, makeup, hair products and perfumes)
- metals (like in jewellery or belts)
- chemicals (at home or at work)

Patch testing does **not** test for:

- food allergies
- hay fever (a common allergy that causes sneezing, coughing and itchy eyes)
- hives (urticaria)
- severe allergies or anaphylaxis (a life-threatening allergic reaction that happens very quickly)

Why do I need to have this test?

Patch testing can help your doctor find out if a substance or substances are causing a delayed allergic skin reaction on direct skin contact, so you know what to avoid or reduce your contact with at home and at work to prevent any further flare-ups.

How should I prepare for patch testing?

Appointments

Patch testing is split over **three** appointments. When you receive your appointment letter, please check that you can attend all three appointments. Contact us if you need to rearrange your test.

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Medications

Contact us as soon as you receive your appointment letter if you are currently taking steroid tablets or immune system medications (for example, prednisolone, methotrexate, azathioprine, ciclosporin, or biologics). These medications can affect your test results.

You can continue to take your other regular medications (including antihistamines), unless we have told you otherwise.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Contact us as soon as you receive your appointment letter if you:

- are pregnant
- think you may be pregnant
- are currently breastfeeding

We may have to postpone your test.

Preparing your skin

Contact us as soon as you receive your appointment letter if you have eczema on your back. We may have to postpone your test until your eczema is better.

It is important that you do **not**:

- expose your back to sunlight, sunbathe or use a sunlamp for **six weeks** before your test and during the patch testing week.
- use steroid creams on your back for **three days** before your test.

Items to bring with you

Bring any products that you think may be causing you to experience a skin reaction, such as a rash. Keep all products in their original packaging with ingredients lists if possible. Examples of products you may wish to bring with you to your test include:

- shampoo or soap
- creams
- makeup or perfume
- hair products
- gloves
- shoes
- work chemicals (ask your employer for safety information like COSHH sheets)
- any suspected items (such as dressings and plasters)

If you are having patch testing before having surgery, please bring a letter from your surgeon containing a list of the components of the materials they will use during the procedure, so we can test these.

Clothing

Wear old, loose, dark-coloured clothing to your appointment as some substances may stain your clothes and bedding. Button-up or zip-up tops are best.

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What will happen during the patch testing week?

You will have three patch testing appointments:

- pre-patch test consultation
- patch test application
- patch test results

Day	Appointment or action	What will happen
	Pre-patch test consultation	<p>Allow 20 minutes for this consultation.</p> <p>During this consultation, a doctor will ask you about your skin problem and decide what substances to test. If your skin is too irritated or you have other skin conditions, like acne on your back, we may need to treat it first before we can perform the patch test.</p> <p>If you are happy to go ahead with this test, we will ask you for your consent (verbal or written) and arrange a date for your patch test application appointment.</p>
0	Patch test application appointment	<p>Allow one hour for this appointment.</p> <p>At this appointment, a nurse will place patches with small amounts of different substances on your back (or sometimes on your arms, stomach or thighs). Substances being tested may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common allergens like rubber, chemicals, metals, perfumes and plants • any other products we identified for testing <p>The nurse will use a marker pen to label the different patches on your skin (please note that this may stain your clothes and bedding). We will also give you a marker pen to take home in case you need to go over any faded pen marks before your results appointment. You will then be able to leave hospital and return to your usual daily activities.</p> <p>Do not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wash, shower or bathe during the patch testing week. • do sports or activities that make you sweat during the patch testing week. <p>Depending on the type of work you do, you may need to ask your employer to amend your normal duties slightly during the patch testing week.</p> <p>Your patches must stay on for 48 hours. Check your patches twice a day to make sure they stay stuck down.</p>

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Day	Appointment or action	What will happen
2	Patch removal at home	<p>You will need to carefully remove the patches and throw them away in your normal household waste.</p> <p>Take photos of your back (or any other tested areas) 30 minutes after removing the patches and bring these photos with you to your patch test results appointment.</p> <p>From now until after your results appointment, do not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wash or apply any creams or products to the tested areas. • draw inside the tested areas.
4	Patch test results appointment	<p>Allow 30 minutes for this appointment.</p> <p>At this appointment, a doctor will check your skin for reactions and explain your results. There are three possible results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative – This means no allergy was found and we can rule out these substances as a cause. • Positive – This means you are allergic to one or more of the substances. Your skin may be red and itchy. • Irritant – This means you have irritated skin due to one or more of the substances, and not a true allergic reaction. Your skin may have patches that are lighter or darker than the area around them (discolouration). <p>Some people may need to have a follow-up appointment a few days later or additional patch tests at a later date. We will discuss this with you if this is the case.</p> <p>You will be able to resume washing and bathing and any sports and activities you usually do after this appointment.</p> <p>If you experience a reaction after your results appointment (even weeks or months later), take a photo and contact us for advice.</p>

Are there any side effects?

Most people do not experience any side effects after this test. However, some people may experience:

- mild redness and itching (this is normal)
- a flare-up of eczema (this is normal)
- blisters (if you have a strong positive reaction)
- signs of an infection, such as pain, redness, discharge and/or a fever (this is rare, and you may need antibiotics)
- scarring (this is very rare, but possible if you have a strong positive reaction)
- skin colour changes - your skin may get darker or lighter in tested areas (this is very rare)
- a new allergy to one of the substances we tested (this is extremely rare)

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If you experience any signs of an infection or have any concerns, contact our patch test nurse for advice on telephone: **023 8120 2871** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm). Outside of these hours, call NHS **111** for advice or visit your nearest urgent treatment centre.

How we store your patch test results

We will store your patch test results securely in our computer database. Sometimes, we share anonymous data (any information that is personal to you and would identify you as an individual will be removed) with other patch testing centres for research and audit purposes to improve allergy testing.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, or need to change your appointment, please contact us before your test.

Patch test booking team

Telephone: **023 8120 2937** (Monday to Thursday, 9.30am to 2.30pm)

If you have any questions or concerns **during your patch testing week**, please call the patch test nurse.

Patch test nurse

Telephone: **023 8120 2871** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

Useful links

www.bad.org.uk/pils/patch-testing

www.cutaneousallergy.org

www.patient.info/skin-conditions/contact-dermatitis/patch-testing-for-contact-dermatitis

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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