

Anorectal Physiology - Information for Patients

Why do I need this test?

You will have recently attended for an outpatient appointment with problems associated with faecal incontinence or constipation, or other bowel problems.

Your Consultant has requested these tests so that he/she can establish what exactly is causing your particular problem. He/she can then offer the most appropriated treatment.

What is anorectal physiology?

Anorectal physiology is a test that looks at the strength of the muscles in your anal canal to see if they are working normally, and also checks the sensitivity of the rectum to small volumes of air and its response to distension.

You will be asked to undress from the waist down and to lie, covered with a sheet, on your left side. Every effort will be made to preserve your privacy and dignity during the procedure, but the nature of the test means that some 'intimate' contact is unavoidable. The investigator will perform a gentle rectal examination to check that the rectum is empty and that you are able to push and squeeze when requested during the test. If your rectum is not empty, we can use a gentle enema to promote a bowel motion.

A small tube (catheter) with a small balloon is then placed into your rectum in order to measure the strength of your muscles. The resting pressure is taken and then you will be asked to squeeze your muscles 3 times so that the strength of them can be assessed.

Next the balloon at the end of the catheter is placed into your rectum. Small volumes of air will be introduced into the balloon, and you will be asked to record your sensations as this is done. We will then ask you to attempt to push the balloon out in order to assess your coordination during attempted defaecation. At this point the investigator will usually analyse the results obtained so far and discuss the findings with you.

Anorectal neurophysiology

Depending on these results, it may be necessary to proceed to some tests to look at the way that the nerve supply to the anal muscles is working. This involves gently stimulating the anal muscles with a signal from the computer and recording the response from your muscles.

What special preparation is there?

No special preparation is necessary; **we would ask you to refrain from eating or drinking for two hours before the test and, if possible, to have had your bowels open on the day of the test.**

Are there any risks associated with these tests?

The test may be a bit uncomfortable but it should not be painful.

There is a very small risk of perforation of the anorectum, however this is a very low risk procedure. The GI physiologist has had specialist training and is very experienced in this procedure.

Medication:

Normally, you can carry on taking any prescribed medication as usual. If you have any doubts about your medication or are unsure about which ones you can or cannot take, please telephone the Unit on (01603) 288281 between 0730-1600 hours for advice.

What happens after my test?

Once the tests are done, the investigator can explain the basic findings to you but will not offer a diagnosis. A report will be sent on to your consultant who will give you a diagnosis and discuss treatment at a future appointment. You will receive another appointment in the post to see your consultant in his/her clinic.

We do not send the results to your GP.

The test should not cause you any lasting after effects. If you drive yourself in, you should be able to drive home immediately afterwards.

If you have any concerns or questions about these tests, please telephone the Unit on 01603 288281 between 07.30 – 16.00 hours. You should be able to speak directly to one of the investigators, or they will return your call as soon as they are able.

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