

Dermatology Department Patch Test Information

This information sheet gives you information about patch testing and what you should expect.

What is patch testing?

Patch testing can help your doctor find out whether your eczema / dermatitis is caused by allergy to substances that come in contact with your skin, e.g. materials at home, work or in leisure activities.

What will be tested?

You will be tested for at least 50 allergens commonly in contact with the skin, e.g. rubber chemicals, metals, perfumes and plants, and possibly additional substances depending on your skin problem.

What should I bring to the patch test clinic?

- A list of medication: any prescribed drugs you are taking, including ointment and creams, along with any over the counter medication.
- Your own products from home which you think **may be making things worse** e.g. toiletries, cosmetics, nail polish, perfumes, hair care products – please bring the product and the packaging, which should list the contents.
- Work chemicals: if you think that substances at work may be causing your rash, please also bring the Health and Safety Data sheets if available.

What does patch testing involve?

Three visits to hospital are required, normally on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

- **Monday:** You will have your patches applied to your back and marked with ink. Allow up to 30 minutes for this visit. The patches remain in place until Wednesday.
- **Wednesday:** You should remove the patches at least one hour before your appointment. Any reactions will be noted and additional patches may occasionally be added.
- **Friday:** Your back will be examined again and any reactions discussed fully with you. Please ask any questions you may have. Please allow up to 15 minutes for the visit.

There are no needles involved, but it can feel rather unpleasant having sticky tape all over the back. Itching is normal and a strong reaction can be very itchy. Men with hairy backs usually find removal of the tape uncomfortable. We may shave their back on the first visit.

What are the reactions like?

Positive reactions become red and itchy at the test site and usually become apparent by the Wednesday reading, although they can occasionally take longer. Your patch tests may be negative. This is helpful since, as far as we can, we will have eliminated contact allergy as a cause of your skin problem. If you do develop a late reaction, please contact the clinic. Some substances may stain the skin; this is normal.

Can anyone have a patch test?

We cannot patch test you if you:

- are pregnant or breastfeeding
- have extensive eczema on your back
- have had sun exposure on your back over the previous six weeks
- are on a moderate or high dose of steroids (e.g. prednisolone tablets more than 10mg/day)
- are taking immunosuppressant treatment.

If any of these apply, please phone for advice.

Do not:

- Do not get your back wet during the tests.
- Do not wear clothes that you may be concerned about staining, as some patches include dyes.
- Do not expose your back to the sun or sun beds during this procedure.

Do:

- Do avoid sport or heavy physical work during the week of the tests.
- Do wear an old bra or T-shirt for the week of the tests and wear a T-shirt or vest to sleep in order to protect the tests.
- If a patch starts to peel off, simply push it back down. If a whole patch comes loose, remove and note the time and date.
- Contact the department if you are concerned between 9am and 5pm.

What side effects may occur?

Side effects are rare, but could include:

- Skin reddening and itching: from positive test results. This usually disappears after a few days.
- Persistent reaction: some positive test reactions may persist for up to a month.
- Flare of eczema: a positive patch test may be accompanied by a flare of existing or previous eczema.
- Pigment change: an increase or decrease in pigment may be seen at the site of patch tests.
- Infection or scarring: these are rare.
- Allergy: very rarely, about 1 in 500 times, you may become allergic to one of the substances applied during patch testing. In practice this does not seem to cause problems in the long term.

Will my results be stored?

We will record the information about your patch test results in a hospital computer database and will use the results for audit in accordance with good medical practice. Anonymous data may be used for research and shared with other centres.

Useful Contacts for further information

Dermatology Department Tel: 01603 288411

Dermatology / Allergy specialist Nurse

British Contact Dermatitis Society - <http://www.bcds.org.uk/>