

Sweat Tests

Child Health Information

What is a sweat test?

Sweat tests are done to look for a condition called cystic fibrosis. A sweat test measures the amount of salt (sodium chloride) in the sweat.

The test is usually carried out on children or adults who are having lots of chest infections, having problems gaining weight or have abnormal stools. It is also done on babies who have had abnormal results on their cystic fibrosis screening test (heel prick).



What is Cystic fibrosis?

Cystic fibrosis is a condition that affects one in every 2,500 children. The condition causes their mucus to be of a thicker, stickier consistency. This can cause chest infections and/or problems with the digestion of food.

Does the test hurt?

Some children experience a tingling sensation on the arm where the sweat glands are being stimulated. No needles are involved in the test.

How is the test carried out?

The outpatient nursing staff are specially trained to do this test. They will explain what they are going to do at the time of the test so do ask questions if you need to.

It will probably take over an hour to do the sweat test. There are toys and drinking water in the department but do bring a book, a drink and some snacks with you if you want. Salty foods such as crisps are best avoided to minimise any risk of contamination of the test.

An area of skin, usually the lower arm or leg, is cleaned with distilled water. Special discs soaked in a chemical called pilocarpine are placed on the skin and a tiny electric current (a tingle) is passed through the arm. This makes the glands produce more sweat. This is removed after about 5 minutes.

A collecting disc is then placed on the skin to collect the sweat. This is secured quite firmly to your child's arm/leg to ensure a good contact.

You will be asked to wait for about 30-40 minutes for the sweat to be collected. During this time you and your child are free to read, play, eat and drink.

The sweat collecting disc is then removed and the sweat sample is sent to the biochemistry lab for testing.

What do the results show?

The doctor who requested the tests will discuss the results with you. Most tests will have a clear cut normal or abnormal (high) result. High results suggesting cystic fibrosis will always be confirmed with further tests.

A few tests will be borderline or unclear or there will not have been enough sweat collected to give an accurate result. In those cases the test will usually need repeating.

How do I get the results?

The results will normally be available within a few days. A member of the team will contact you by phone. If you have not heard within three working days please contact children's outpatients, or your consultant's secretary, and they will arrange for someone to contact you.

Further questions

If you have any questions about the process of doing the sweat test or if you have not had your results please contact the Children's Outpatients staff on 01225 824203.