

Patient information factsheet

Having a sweat test

We have given you this factsheet because your doctor has referred you for a sweat test. It explains what a sweat test is, why it is used and what the results mean for you. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of the factsheet.

What is a sweat test?

A sweat test is a test to help diagnose if you have cystic fibrosis (CF).

Cystic fibrosis is an inherited condition that causes sticky mucus to build up in the lungs and digestive system. This causes lung infections and problems with digesting food. People with cystic fibrosis have a faulty gene that affects the movement of salt (chloride) and water in and out of their cells. This results in higher concentrations of salt in their sweat compared to people who do not have cystic fibrosis.

In the sweat test we measure the amount of salt (usually measured as chloride) that is in your sweat. We do this by collecting a small amount of sweat from your arm.

Why do I need a sweat test?

Your doctor has referred you for this test because some of your symptoms or a recent test result has raised the possibility that you may have cystic fibrosis, or you have a family history of cystic fibrosis. The sweat test is used in combination with your symptom history, as well as a range of other tests, to help your doctor make, or exclude, a diagnosis of cystic fibrosis.

Is the test suitable for everyone?

We may not be able to do the test if you use creams or lotions on your skin, or if you have skin conditions, such as:

- eczema
- psoriasis

Please discuss this with your hospital team before you come to the hospital for the sweat test.

How should I prepare for the test?

You do not need to do any special preparation for this test. Before the test, you may eat, drink, and exercise as usual, and continue to take any current medicines. However, you should **not** apply creams and lotions to your skin for 24 hours before your test.

What will happen on the day of the test?

Your sweat test appointment will be in the cystic fibrosis (CF) outpatient department at Southampton General Hospital. A specially trained nurse will perform the test.

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We will clean a small area of skin, usually on your arm, with water and a small alcohol wipe. We will then place a special gel disc on your arm. This disc contains a liquid which will help to make you sweat. We will then apply a tiny electrical current from a battery box to the patch on your arm for five minutes. This should not hurt, but you may feel a slight tingling sensation.

After five minutes, we will remove the gel disc from your arm and replace it with a sweat collector (a disc that looks like a wristwatch). Your sweat is then collected into the disc for about 20 to 30 minutes. During this time, you will be free to read and eat, but you must not eat any salty foods (for example, crisps). This is to minimise the chance of contamination from salt in your food with your sweat test. We will then remove the plastic disc tubing that has collected your sweat from your arm. We will send your sweat to the laboratory for analysis.

The whole process takes around 45 minutes. We will take sweat from both your arms at the same time.

Sometimes, we may need to repeat the test if we didn't manage to collect enough sweat or if the results are not clear. This may be on the same day or on a different day. If this is the case, we will discuss this with you.

What happens after the test?

After the test you will be free to leave. The test is very safe and doesn't usually cause any side effects.

You may find that the area of skin that has been tested may stay red for a few hours after the test, but this is perfectly normal. Please contact us or speak to your GP if you are concerned.

We will send your test result to the doctor who referred you for the test. They will then arrange an appointment for you, either face-to-face or virtual, to discuss the results of the test.

Contact us

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

Adult cystic fibrosis department
Telephone: **023 8120 6801**

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