

Skin Prick Testing

A skin prick test is a quick and usually painless procedure that can help to establish if you have any particular allergies.

The five main categories for allergy skin prick testing are:

- House dust mite.
- Animal dander.
- Pollens.
- Moulds.
- Foods (food testing is usually completed in a tertiary centre, and not currently at East and North Hertfordshire NHS Teaching Trust).

What is allergy?

Allergy is the term used to describe a hypersensitive response by the body's immune system to a substance in the environment, such as pollens or food. In most people, the body recognises these as harmless, however some people tend to develop allergy.

What to do before the test

- Stop taking all antihistamines (e.g., Piriton, Clarityn) for 5 days prior to the test.
- Please avoid using steroid creams/body creams on your forearms.

Please alert us if you are unable to stop using your antihistamine treatment.

The test



- The forearm will be used for skin testing.
- A pen is used to mark the skin and a small droplet of each allergen solution, including a positive and negative control, is placed next to the pen mark.
- A small lancet needle is used to prick through the droplet to the surface of the skin.

The positive control is histamine. Histamine is a substance the body releases in response to the allergen. This will produce a red wheal, very similar to a nettle sting, and will cause the skin to itch.

The negative control is saline (salt water) and does not usually react with the skin. Once the test has been completed, the surplus solution will be removed and you will be asked to wait for 20 minutes.

Positive reaction

A positive reaction will produce a red patch of skin with a white raised weal in the centre - like a nettle rash. This may also feel very itchy. The size of the weal varies in diameter and usually takes 10 - 20 minutes to occur. The size of the weal is then measured.

The weal will usually disappear approximately 1 hour after the test. The area on your arm may remain itchy for a short while. Very occasionally, a small lump occurs over a positive test 12-24 hours after the test. This is not dangerous and subsides inside a couple of days. You can use antihistamine cream to help relieve any itch.

Further information

- **Allergy UK** www.allergyuk.org
Helpline 01322 619898
- **Anaphylaxis UK** www.anaphylaxis.org.uk
Helpline 01252 542029
- **NHS Website** www.nhs.uk/conditions/allergies/
- **NHS Website** www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-allergy/

Useful contact details

East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk
- Telephone 01438 314333

Respiratory Nurse Specialist Helpline:

- Telephone 01438 285995

Leaflet information

You can request this information in a different format or another language; please speak to your doctor or nurse.

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