

Patient Information – Patch Testing

Department of Dermatology

What is patch testing?

The aim of patch testing is to try to discover whether you are allergic to anything that is coming into contact with your skin.

How will patch testing help?

By finding out what you are allergic to, you will be able to avoid further contact with the offending substance and this may lead to a clearance of your rash.

Are there limitations to patch testing?

Patch tests are only helpful to investigate allergies which are due to direct skin contact with substances outside the body. It does not detect allergies related to diet or anything that is inhaled and may result in sneezing, asthma or urticarial (hives).

Are there times when I may not have a patch test?

Your doctor may decide not to patch test you if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, have extensive eczema on your back, have a suntan or have applied an artificial suntan or have used a sunbed in the previous two weeks. Sun exposure or tanning may make the results of the patch tests unreliable.

How is the patch test carried out?

A number of different substances are placed into small plastic or aluminium chambers and applied to your back using non-allergenic tape. Your back will be marked with a felt-tip skin marker pen.

Is the patch test painful?

No. The patch test is not painful although the patches may feel strange stuck to your back and may cause you to feel itchy. This is normal and nothing to be concerned about. If the itching is severe, the patches may have to be removed. There are no injections involved in the patch testing.

How many visits will I have to make?

You will need to make **three** visits in the same week:

1. **Monday** for the patches to be applied.
2. **Wednesday** to have the patches removed.
3. **Friday** to see the doctor for the final reading. You will be able to discuss the findings at this appointment and the doctor will give you information about any of the substances that you have reacted to.

All three appointments must be attended.

What do I need to bring with me on the first visit?

You do not need to bring anything with you for the patch test appointment unless you were instructed to do so by the doctor at your consultation.

What do I need to do before the patch test?

You should shower/wash your back as normal but **do not** apply any creams and/or ointments to your back prior to your first appointment. If you have a hairy upper back it helps to shave the area a couple of days before the first patch test visit. You should inform the doctor of any medication that you are taking, particularly if you are taking oral steroids.

What do I need to be aware of during the week of the testing period?

- You should not bathe or shower while the patch tests are in place as they may come off and the tests will be invalidated. You will also need to keep your back completely dry until after your final visit on the Friday.
- Wearing a vest or t-shirt in bed may stop patches from peeling away.
- Avoid excessive bending and twisting movements as the patch tests may become unstuck. Also avoid any strenuous exercise as sweating will prevent the patches from sticking to you.
- If you feel the chambers or edges become loose or unstuck, please tape them back with Micropore hypoallergenic tape (available from any chemist).
- Try not to rub or scratch the area during the test. If your back is excessively itchy the patch tests may be removed, however, you will need to note the chamber number that you think has caused the reaction.
- The pen may stain your clothing, so it is advisable to wear old, preferably dark-coloured tops.

Contact details

Dermatology Department
Hertford County Hospital
North Road
Hertford
Hertfordshire SG14 1LP

Telephone: Secretary to Dr Mazzon	☎ 01992 823012
Secretary to Dr Hargest	☎ 01992 823012
Secretary to Dr Gupta	☎ 01992 823178
Secretary to Dr Shahzad	☎ 01992 823178
Secretary to Dr Ogden	☎ 01992 823092
Secretary to Dr Hemmady	☎ 01992 823092
Dermatology nurse helpline	☎ 01992 823038
Minor operation bookings	☎ 01992 823069
Outpatient appointments	☎ 01438 284444

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