

Overnight dexamethasone suppression test

Diabetes and Endocrinology Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is about a test known medically as a dexamethasone suppression test. The test can be used to screen for a condition called Cushing's syndrome.

The leaflet gives information on Cushing's syndrome, what happens during the test and the benefits and risks of it. If you would like any more information about the test, please contact us on one of the numbers at the end of the leaflet.

What is Cushing's syndrome?

Cushing's syndrome is a condition in which too much of a hormone called cortisol is produced by the body.

Cortisol is a natural steroid hormone or chemical signal. It is produced by the adrenal glands, which are just above the kidneys, in response to instructions from the pituitary gland, which is a small gland beneath the brain.

Cortisol is a vital hormone which is responsible for enabling your body to respond to stress and illness. Cortisol also regulates your immune system, blood pressure and blood glucose levels.

What is a dexamethasone suppression test?

The test involves taking one tablet of a medication called dexamethasone and then having a blood test the next day.

Dexamethasone is a type of medication known as a corticosteroid. The medication usually decreases (suppresses) the level of a hormone called adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) in the body. This hormone travels through the bloodstream to the adrenal glands and stimulates them to make cortisol. A decrease in ACTH levels should trigger the adrenal glands to decrease production of cortisol.

However, if your cortisol levels remain abnormally high even after taking a dose of dexamethasone, this could mean you have Cushing's syndrome.

Occasionally, other conditions such as major depression, alcoholism, stress, obesity, kidney failure, pregnancy or uncontrolled diabetes can also keep cortisol levels from decreasing after taking a dose of dexamethasone. Therefore, you may also need to have other tests to diagnose your condition.

What are the benefits of the test?

It can help your consultant to diagnose your medical condition and therefore suggest possible treatment for you.

What are the risks?

There are no known long term risks from taking a single tablet of dexamethasone.

What are the alternatives?

It can be difficult to diagnose Cushing's syndrome. A number of different tests may be necessary including blood tests, urine tests and scans. This varies from patient to patient, and depends on the results of your investigations. Your consultant will give you more information about this.

What should I do before the test?

Please tell us if you are currently taking any other medications containing steroids (prescription or non-prescription), or you have taken these in the past.

You should continue to take all your other prescribed medications and treatments before the test, unless you are instructed not to.

What happens during the test?

We will provide you with a dexamethasone tablet and a form for a blood test. You will need to take the dexamethasone tablet between 10pm and 11pm the night before your blood test. The next morning, go for your **blood test at 9am and take your blood form with you**. Bloods can be obtained at Russells Hall Hospital, Corbett Outpatient Centre, Guest Outpatient Centre or the Merry Hill Blood Test Centre.

How will I find out the results of the test?

Usually, we will give you the results at your next outpatient appointment. The majority of results are available two to three weeks after you have had the test.

However, we may also send you a letter informing you of the result and giving information about any further tests we recommend.

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following weblink:

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Cushings-syndrome/Pages/Diagnosis.aspx>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

The Diabetes Centre on 01384 244399 or the endocrine nursing team on ext 3672 (8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/diabetes-and-endocrinology/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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