Patch test information leaflet for patients

Department of Dermatology

Information for Patients and Carers
What is patch testing?

- Patch testing can help your doctor find out if your skin condition is caused by an allergy from something that is regularly in contact with your skin.
- Skin contact with an allergen might occur at home, at work or during your free time.
- Patch Testing does not test for food allergies.

This test is done in our Dermatology Department, the address and directions are at the end of the information leaflet.

What will I be tested to?

- You will be tested to around 40 standard substances commonly in contact with the skin, including nickel, preservatives, perfumes and rubber.
- Additional substances will be included depending on your skin problem.
- You may be tested to some of your own work or home products.

What should I bring to the patch test clinic?

**On the first appointment please bring:**

- A list of medications: including any prescribed drugs you are taking.
- Your own products: substances that you have discussed with the doctor that you might be allergic to e.g. toiletries, cosmetics, nail polish, perfumes, hair care products. Please bring the package, which will list the contents.
- Work chemicals: if the doctor thinks that chemicals at work may be causing the problem, please deliver samples in well-sealed labelled containers 2 weeks before your appointment to the dermatology unit. Please also bring the Health and Safety Data sheets, which will be available in your place of work.

What does patch testing involve?

You will need to attend the hospital on 3 separate days in the week.

- On the first visit, you will be interviewed by the specialist nurse.
- The substances to be tested will be applied in special small containers to your back attached by hypoallergenic tape.
• Please do not apply a moisturiser to your back on the morning of this appointment, and do not take any Antihistamines one day prior to the test.

• The sites are marked with a skin marker pen. If you have a very hairy back it would be helpful if you could shave the area before attending your appointment.

• The tape remains in place until your second visit when it is removed and any reactions noted.

• On the third visit, your back will be examined and any reactions discussed with you by the doctor.

• The sites may itch. This is normal.

• Positive reactions become red and itchy at the test site and usually become apparent by the third reading.

**What happens if all the patch tests are negative?**

• This is helpful since, as far as we can, we have eliminated contact allergy as a cause of your skin problem.

We may not patch test you if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, have extensive eczema on your back, have had sun exposure or used a sun bed over the previous 2 weeks, or are on a moderate to high dose of steroids. If these apply, or you need to change your appointments please telephone the dermatology department.

**How should I care for my Patch tests?**

• Please keep your back dry during the tests.

• Do not wear your best clothes as the marker ink may stain.

• Do not expose your back to the sun during this procedure.

• Do avoid sport or heavy physical work during the tests.

• Do wear old clothing and a T-shirt or vest to sleep in order to help keep the patches in place.

• If a patch starts to peel off, reinforce with medical tape.

*Contact us at the dermatology department if you are concerned or have a late reaction to the tests.*
What side effects may occur?

**Side effects include:**
- Skin reddening and itching. This is usually a small patch of skin and disappears after a few days.
- Staining of the skin. This will usually disappear after a few days.
- Skin Pigment change: an increase or decrease in pigment may sometimes be seen at the site of the patch tests.
- A flare of Eczema may occur, this side effect is rare.

If you would like to find out more about patch testing you may find the following websites helpful:

**British Association of Dermatologists:**
www.bad.org.uk/public/leaflets
http://dermnetnz.org/proceedures/patchtests

If you have any concerns about your appointment or treatment, please call the telephone numbers below:

**Princess Royal Hospital**
01444 441881 Ext.5445
(Dermatology Nurse Specialist)

**Brighton General Hospital**
Appointments Office 01273 665033  Patient Helpline 01273 665140

References