



# Having a Sweat Test



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[yeovilhospital.nhs.uk](http://yeovilhospital.nhs.uk)



This leaflet has been produced to provide information for people who have been referred for a sweat test. In addition, it explains how you can get the results of your test and what they may mean.

## What is a sweat test?

A routine test to exclude Cystic Fibrosis.

A sweat test measures the amount of salt (usually as chloride) that is in the sweat.

## Why does this need to be carried out?

The test is carried out on children or adults who are having recurrent chest infections, those that have frequent and unexplained pale stools, those that are having problems gaining weight or growing properly, or as part of a screening programme.

There are also other rarer indications for sweat test. A positive result may mean that you or your child has cystic fibrosis (CF) but a final diagnosis will take into account other symptoms, clinical findings and test results.

People with CF have a high amount of salt in their sweat. A normal result can be helpful in ruling out CF. It is important to diagnose this condition as soon as possible in order to begin appropriate treatment.

## Who does this test?

A member of staff from the Biochemistry laboratory performs the test.

## How is the test carried out?

Special discs soaked in a chemical called Pilocarpine that stimulates sweat production are placed on the lower arm or leg. These are secured in place and a small electric current is passed through the discs from a battery box to further stimulate the sweating process.

The test is not painful, although a tingling sensation may occur. The discs are left in place for five minutes and then removed. There should be a red mark where the Pilocarpine has stimulated the skin. This is a usual phenomenon and should fade within a few hours. The skin is then carefully washed with pure water and dried.

A collection device the size of a watch face is placed over the stimulated area and firmly secured. You will then be asked to wait for about 30 minutes for the sweat to be collected into the collection device. The collection device will be checked frequently by the member of staff.

During that time the person taking the test is free to read, play or eat, although salty foods such as crisps should be avoided to minimise any risk of contamination.

The sweat is removed from the collection device after 30 minutes and is sent to the laboratory for analysis.

From start to finish the test should take approximately one hour.

## Possible side-effects

### Common

Tingling at the site of sweat collection.

### Rarely

Some patients experience a reaction to the pilocarpine, causing an eczema like rash.

## The results

In most cases the results will clearly show either a high (abnormal) or normal salt level in the sweat. Sometimes the results can be borderline and the test will need to be repeated.

In a few cases the test may need to be repeated for technical reasons such as not enough sweat has been collected.

Many doctors like to confirm an abnormal sweat test with a second sweat test.

## How long will it take to get the results?

Generally results are returned to the consultant within five days after the sweat test was performed.

## Who will inform me of the results?

The doctor who requested the test will inform you of the results at your next appointment or by telephone.

## Further questions

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the need for a sweat test on yourself or your child, please speak to the doctor who has referred you for this test, as they can give you further information.

**If you need this leaflet in another format, eg. large print or a different language, please ask a member of staff.**

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Ref: 10-17-112  
Review: 02/19