

Short Synacthen Test

Patient Information

**This leaflet contains important information about your test.
Please ensure you read and understand it.**



Synacthen Test

This information is for patients requiring a synacthen test including:

- Why your doctor has recommended it be done
- What is a short synacthen test
- Any risks and side effects
- What happens after the test

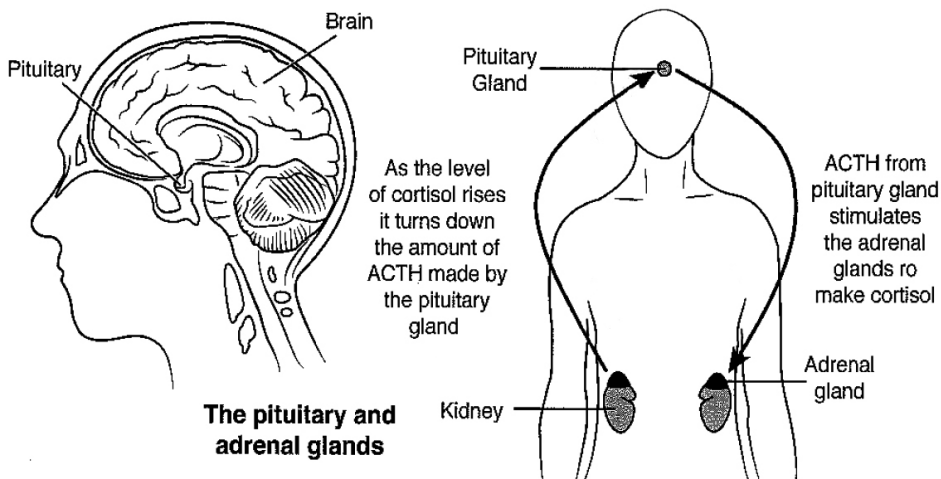
Why do I need this test?

Your doctor has recommended that you have a synacthen test to check if your body is producing enough steroid hormone.

Cortisol is your body's natural steroid hormone which is produced by the adrenal glands which sit above the kidneys.

Cortisol production is controlled by the pituitary gland which is a tiny gland underneath the brain. The pituitary gland produces a hormone called ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone).

This hormone travels through the bloodstream to the adrenal glands and stimulates them to make cortisol. Low cortisol levels can indicate a problem with either the pituitary gland or the adrenal glands. Immunotherapy can affect how the pituitary gland and the adrenal glands produce hormones.



Cortisol has 3 main roles:

- To control blood pressure
- To help control blood sugar levels
- To help the body deal with the stress of illness and injury

If you do not have the correct amount of cortisol you may feel tired, weak or irritable. If the synacthen test shows that you are not producing enough cortisol you can be given medicine to replace this.

What is a synacthen test?

A synacthen test uses a special chemical (synacthen) to test how well the adrenal glands make cortisol. It involves stimulating the adrenal glands and then checking to see if they respond.

- You may eat your usual breakfast and take your usual medication unless we tell you otherwise.
- If you are taking steroid tablets you need to stop taking these 24 hours before the test. This must be discussed with your medical team first.
- If you are using steroid creams or inhalers please discuss with your medical team as you may need to stop taking these medicines for a short while if possible.

The test must be done in the morning so you will be given an early appointment to attend the Macmillan Day Case Unit. You will be given a chair and will stay sitting for the duration of the test.

A nurse will place a cannula, which is a small tube used to take blood samples, into a vein in your arm. After 15 minutes a blood sample will be taken to measure your cortisol level. The nurse will then give you an injection of synacthen through the cannula. The synacthen should stimulate your adrenal glands causing a rise in cortisol level.

Thirty minutes after the injection the nurse will take another blood sample to measure your cortisol level.

Once the test is completed the cannula will be removed and you will be able to go home.

Are there any risks or side effects with this test?

Synacthen can cause mild side effects such as feeling sick (nausea), facial flushing, palpitations or mild back pain. These pass quickly. You should not have any lasting side effects.

There is a risk of an allergic reaction with this test however this is rare and the members of staff in the Macmillan Day Case Unit are experienced in treating this.

What happens after the test?

Your consultant will get the results back within a few days. You will be contacted by a member of your medical team with results. If there are any changes to be made to your treatment this will be explained and organised by your oncology team.

What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions before the test please contact your Specialist Nurse or Consultant's secretary.

Contact details

Nurse Specialist: _____

Consultant's secretary: _____

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