

Information for patients

Introduction

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information regarding an overnight dexamethasone suppression test.

What is dexamethasone?

Dexamethasone is a corticosteroid that prevents the release of substances in the body that cause inflammation. For the purposes of this test, dexamethasone is used to suppress a hormone called ACTH which stimulates the release of cortisol from the adrenal gland.

What is cortisol?

Cortisol is a steroid hormone that regulates many processes in the body, including metabolism and the immune response. It also has a very important role in helping the body to respond to stress.

Why is my child having this test?

An overnight dexamethasone suppression test is done to check for a condition in which large amounts of cortisol are produced by the adrenal glands (Cushings Syndrome). Cushings is a collection of symptoms caused by very high levels of cortisol in the blood, including weight gain, muscle or bone weakness, fat deposits that develop in the face, causing it to become round, thinning skin that bruises easily, and reddish-purple stretch marks on the thighs, buttocks, stomach, arms, legs and breasts.

What does the test involve?

You will be given some medicine that your child will have to take on the night before the test between 22:00-23:00 (dexamethasone). Your child will then require a blood test the following morning between 08:00 – 09:00. For this they will be asked to attend the Children's outpatient department, a blood clinic or if over 12 years of age and it is appropriate for them, they will be asked to attend the pathology department at their local hospital. Your endocrine nurse specialist will discuss these options with you.

You will have either been provided with numbing cream to apply 40 minutes prior to attending for the blood test or will be offered a cold numbing spray to be used at the time of the test. The blood test will involve the nurse squeezing your child's arm to allow the vein to fill with blood and another nurse or doctor will insert a small needle into the vein to collect the blood sample. The needle will then be removed, and you will be able to go home.

The timing of the medication and the blood test is important to allow your doctor to interpret the results correctly.

It is important that you inform your doctor of any medications your child is on, including inhalers and creams, as these may affect the results and may need to be stopped for a brief time.

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Can my child eat and drink before the test?

They may eat and drink as normal, unless specified by your doctor or nurse, as other blood tests may be required at the same time that needs your child to be fasted.

When will we receive the results of the test?

You will usually be given a follow up appointment with the consultant to discuss the results and any further actions needed. The nurse looking after your child will check this for you before discharge.

Benefits

Having this test will assist your child's consultant in deciding upon your child's future care, management plan and treatment.

Risks

Long term use of dexamethasone can have many side effects, but a single dose is unlikely to have any side effects at all. If you have any concerns, please speak to the doctor requesting the test or the endocrinology specialist nurse.

Alternatives

It can be difficult to diagnose Cushings syndrome. A number of other tests may be necessary, including blood tests, urine tests and scans. This varies from patient to patient, and your endocrinologist will be able to discuss this in more detail.

Reference Section

www.yourhormones.info

www.nhs.uk

Contact Details for Further Information

Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital

Rainforest Ward 03033 304477

Children's Endocrine Nurses 03033 304682

Scunthorpe General Hospital

Disney Ward 03033 302553

Children's Endocrine Nurse 03033 306153

Information for patients

Any Comments, Compliments, Concerns or Complaints

If you have any other concerns please talk to your nurse, therapist or doctor. Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) are available on 03033 306518 (Grimsby, Scunthorpe and Goole). You can also contact nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net

As a Trust we value equality of access to our information and services, therefore alternative formats available on request at nlg-tr.interpreters@nhs.net

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