

What is a sweat test?

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Patient information on **sweat testing**



What is a sweat test?

A sweat test is used to test for cystic fibrosis. It is not for monitoring cystic fibrosis progression.

Cystic fibrosis is an inherited disorder that disrupts the normal function of some skin cells, which make up the sweat glands in the skin and also line passageways inside the lungs, liver, pancreas, and digestive and reproductive systems. People who have cystic fibrosis are more prone to repeated chest infections, have difficulty in absorbing nutrients from food, and there is excess salt in the sweat.

A sweat test measures the amount of salt in sweat. Individuals with cystic fibrosis can have two to five times the normal amount of salt in their sweat. In a sweat test, the skin is stimulated to produce sweat to be absorbed into a special collector and then analysed.

When is a sweat test requested?

Doctors will request a sweat test when a patient (usually a child) has a close relative who has been diagnosed with cystic fibrosis or has symptoms of cystic fibrosis. These can include salty sweat, frequent lung infections and chronic cough, persistent diarrhoea, foul-smelling bulky greasy stools, or malnutrition.

What do I need to do before the test and how long will it take?

Before having a sweat test, the patient may eat, drink, and exercise as usual, and continue to take any current medications. Creams and lotions should not be applied to the skin 24 hours before the procedure.

A sweat test usually takes about an hour, so you may want to bring books or toys to help your child pass the time. Please bring along a jacket for the patient to keep warm during the test. This will help the patient to sweat.

There are no needles used in this procedure.



What happens during the test?

1 A small amount of sweat stimulating liquid soaked on a gauze or gel pad is applied to a small area of skin at either the inner side of the arm or the thigh.

A mild electrical current stimulates the area that causes the child to sweat.

This is a painless procedure that may create a tingling or warm sensation.

2 After 5 minutes, the current is switched off and the gauze or gel pads are removed.

Sweat will be collected for the next 30 minutes onto a piece of filter paper or a small circular collector.

The test procedure finishes after sweat collection is completed.

3 The sweat obtained is sent to the laboratory where the salt content of the sweat is measured.

Results of this test will be sent directly to your doctor within one week.