

Overnight dexamethasone suppression test patient information leaflet and instructions

What is an overnight dexamethasone suppression test?

This test is to find out if your body is producing too much of a hormone called cortisol. Dexamethasone (a steroid tablet) is given with the intention of suppressing your blood cortisol level. If your blood cortisol level does not suppress (reduce) after taking the dexamethasone tablet it may mean you are producing too much cortisol, known as Cushing's syndrome and further tests may be required.

Why do I need this test?

You may have been referred for this test if you have signs or symptoms of Cushing's syndrome. Alternatively, you may have been referred for this test for another reason, such as the discovery of a lump or nodule in one of your body's adrenal glands (these produce cortisol).

What are the benefits?

The test will help us to screen for Cushing's syndrome (an excess amount of cortisol in the bloodstream). In most cases Cushing's syndrome requires treatment so it is important to get a diagnosis.

What are the risks?

It is unusual to have side effects from a single dexamethasone dose. However, some people may have difficulty sleeping or have vivid dreams. If you have diabetes, blood glucose levels may be higher than usual for a day or so.

Are there any alternatives?

There are no alternatives to this test.

Instructions for the test?

We will ask your GP practice to give you a prescription for 1mg of dexamethasone (usually as two 0.5mg tablets). An appointment will also be arranged, either at your GP practice or at a community "Investigation and Treatment Room" (ITR), to have a blood sample taken.

It is important the blood test is performed at 9am. The dexamethasone tablets must be taken before going to bed (ideally about 11pm) the night before the blood test.

You may eat and drink normally prior to the test.

It is important that you do not take any other steroid medication for 12 hours before the test and do not restart these medicines until the tests have been completed.

For example, if you are taking any other steroids such as: hydrocortisone, prednisolone or dexamethasone tablets, steroid inhalers or creams:

- Do not take any of these steroid medications past 9pm on the day before the test.
- Do not take any of these steroid medications on the day of the test until the blood test has been completed.
- They can then be restarted as per your usual prescription.

Apart from the medications mentioned above you can continue to take your other regular prescribed medications, unless advised by your doctor.

What happens after my test?

The blood sampling should not take long. You will then be able to go home. Results will be reviewed by your consultant. They will either be sent to you by letter or, in some cases, the results will be discussed with you on the phone or at your next clinic appointment. We will also send a letter to your GP. This may take up to six weeks.

Contact

If you have any additional questions, please get in touch via the endocrine secretaries on: 01463 705444/ 705557/ 705322