

The ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

Glucose Hydrogen / Methane Breath Testing

Endoscopy Suite

Patient Information



NHS

What is a breath test?

A glucose hydrogen/methane breath test is used to diagnose the syndrome of intestinal bacterial overgrowth.

Why am I having a breath test?

If the anatomy or physiology of your digestive tract have been changed by surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy or other conditions, you may have symptoms such as watery loose stool, a need to rush to the lavatory, wind, bloating and weight loss.

If the levels of hydrogen and/or methane in the exhaled breath are high after the ingestion of glucose, this may indicate bacterial overgrowth. We will measure these gases in your breath.

What preparation will I need for my breath test?

We will ask you to change your diet and to omit some medication so that any breath test measurements recorded are accurate. It is important that you follow the instructions below very carefully. If these are not followed, your procedure may have to be cancelled.

Four weeks before:

- Do not take any antibiotics. If you take any antibiotics long-term, discuss this with the referring clinician
- Do not take any probiotics
- Any procedure requiring cleansing the bowel (such as colonoscopy) should not be done.

One week before:

- Stop taking any medication which influences gut movement: laxatives, fibre supplements and prokinetics (medication increasing movements of the bowels).
- Stop taking Loperamide (Imodium) 48 hours before the test, if possible. Please discuss with your referring clinician if you are not sure.

One day before:

- Avoid any high fibre foods, wholemeal products and dairy products.
- Food / drinks which **you can have:** white bread, white rice, potatoes, eggs, meat, fish, water, black coffee and tea.
- Food / drinks **which you cannot have:** pasta, vegetables, fruit, fruit juices, fizzy drinks, dairy products, pulses (lentils etc), nuts and seeds, sweets and chocolate.

On the day of the test:

- Stop eating 12 hours before the test. Water is allowed. Do not eat anything during the test.
- Clean your teeth, but avoid mouthwash if it contains sugar or alcohol
- Do not smoke in the morning before the test and during the test.
- Avoid exercising or sleeping during the test.
- Have your usual medication (including blood pressure tablets) in the morning. If you have insulin-dependent diabetes, do not administer insulin in the morning, but bring the medication with you so that insulin can be administered immediately after the test, together with the food.

What will happen when I come up for the breath test?

- We will ask you to blow (exhale) into a bag for a baseline measurement
- We will give you a small amount of sweet liquid (glucose) to drink
- We will ask you to blow (exhale) into a bag at specific times until the test is completed
- Please write down any bowel symptoms you experience during the test
- Please allow 2.5 hours to be at the hospital.

When will I know the results?

The results will either be assessed on the day or during the subsequent appointment in the clinic by the referring doctor. They will be sent to your GP and the consultant who referred you for the test. A follow up appointment will be arranged if it is needed.

Contact details

For routine advice, please contact

The Endoscopy Suite 020 7811 8328 / 020 7811 8320
(Monday to Friday, 8am – 5pm)

If we cannot take your call, please leave an answerphone message. These will be collected twice daily (Monday to Friday) and a member of the Endoscopy Suite will return your call.

Outside of working hours 020 7352 8171

Please call the main switchboard and ask to speak to the clinical site practitioner.

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

For further information, please visit The Royal Marsden website:
www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/your-care/support-services/royal-marsden-macmillan-hotline

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083

Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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