

Patient information

Overnight 1mg Dexamethasone Suppression Test (OnDST)

Your doctor has advised you to have an Overnight Dexamethasone Suppression Test. This leaflet tells you about the procedure. It explains what is involved and what happens after the test. It is not meant to replace informed discussion between you and your doctor but can act as a starting point for such a discussion.

You should have plenty of time to discuss your situation with your consultant and perhaps even your own general practitioner (GP.)

What is an Overnight Dexamethasone Suppression Test?

It's a test which is used to investigate any potential excess body production of steroids (cortisol). For most patients, this is an initial screening for a condition called Cushing's syndrome.

The test is performed at home on an outpatient basis.

It involves you taking 1 milligram (mg) of Dexamethasone (usually in a tablet form) at 2300H and then having a blood test for serum cortisol level at 0900H the next morning.

Dexamethasone 1 mg is a small dose of steroid and should switch off your body's natural steroid hormones but will not affect your normal daily activities.

Why would I need this procedure?

An overnight 1mg Dexamethasone suppression test will help your doctor to find out why you are having symptoms and make a diagnosis. This will then allow your healthcare team to plan your treatment. This test is to check if your body is making too much of its natural steroid hormones (cortisol). Cortisol is a vital hormone that is responsible for enabling the body to respond to stress and illness also regulates your immune system, blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

What are the symptoms that have led to me having this procedure?

You may be presenting symptoms of excess steroids such as weight gain to the trunk of your body plus a rounding of your face, a fatty hump at the top of your spine/back, flushed appearance, extreme mood swings, muscle weakness, extreme hairiness and dark purple striae on abdomen and upper thighs.

What are the alternatives?

There are no recommended alternatives to this test.

What are the potential risks and side effects?

- There is a risk of allergic reaction to this test, although this is extremely rare. Please inform the endocrine team of any history of allergic reactions.
- If you have diabetes, this test might cause a temporary rise in your blood glucose levels after the test for about a day.
- You may also have trouble sleeping after taking the dexamethasone tablet.
- If you are pregnant or think you may be, please inform your endocrine specialist nurse prior to your appointment.

Preparation for your test

- You can eat and drink as normal prior to your appointment unless advised not to.
- We will ask for the list of your medications during your pre-assessment appointment.
- You may take your usual medication as normal on the day of the test. However, if you take a **contraceptive pill, hormone replacement therapy, steroid containing medications (tablets, nasal drops, inhalers, skin cream), or have recently had a joint injection**, it is important that you inform us prior to your test.
- If you are taking oestrogen containing medicines (e.g. contraceptive pill or HRT), you will need to stop these medications for at least 6 weeks prior to the test. **If you are taking the oestrogen pill for contraception, it is important that you consider other forms of contraception to avoid pregnancy.**

What happens during the test?

As part of the test, the endocrine nursing team will contact you beforehand for a pre-assessment to discuss the test procedure prior to your appointment.

A blood request form will be sent to you by post. You will then have to arrange an appointment for your 9am blood test either at your local GP surgery or the hospital blood clinic (Conquest Hospital or EDGH).

Once you have booked your 0900H blood test appointment, you will need to take the Dexamethasone 1mg (usually in tablet form) at 2300H the night before.

Accurate timing is crucial for the success of this test. Please ensure that your blood test appointment is confirmed prior to starting the test. Please ensure that your Dexamethasone 1 mg is taken at the correct time as per advice.

Will I have an anaesthetic?

No

How long will I be in the Endocrine suite or the hospital?

You will only attend the hospital if you decided to have the blood test done at the blood clinic in the hospital which may last to about 30 minutes.

What should I do when I go home?

In most cases, patients resume their normal activities.

How soon will I be able to resume normal activities?

In most cases, this test should not affect your normal activities.

Will I have to come back to the Endocrine Suite or the hospital?

Depending on the test results, further tests may be required.

When can I return to work?

There are no work restrictions after performing the test and in most cases, patients resume their usual activities.

Consent

Although you consent for this test, you may at any time withdraw such consent. Please discuss this with your endocrine team.

Sources of information

For queries concerning this leaflet or your procedure please contact:

Endocrine Team at ESHT

Telephone: 0300 131 5910 - EDGH and CQ

Opening Hours: 8am – 4pm (Monday – Friday except Bank Holidays)

Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

Consultant Endocrinologists (ESHT):

Dr David Till, Dr Umesh Dashora, Dr P. Sathis Kumar, Dr Ashref Bdiri, Dr. Koshy Jacob,
Dr Shakeel Ahmad, Dr Sadekh Elrokh

Biochemistry Consultants (ESHT):

Dr Yvette Lolin, Dr Hagosa Abraha, Dr Abd Al Hasan, Dr Indra Ramasamy

Endocrine Specialist Nursing Team (ESHT):

Mrs Maria Ravelo (Senior Endocrine Specialist Nurse)

Miss Angel Johnson (Endocrine Specialist Nurse)

Mrs Debby Gordon (Endocrine Assistant Practitioner)

The Endocrinology Department has agreed this patient information leaflet.

Next review date: February 2025

Responsible clinician/authors: Mrs Maria Ravelo (Senior ESN)
Mr Aldons Chua (TWS ESN)

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