



# Short Synacthen test

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## Information for parents and carers

You have been given this leaflet as concerns have been raised about your child's cortisol levels. This leaflet explains the following.

- What a Short Synacthen test is.
- What will happen if you choose not to have the test.
- What happens before, during, and after the test.
- What the possible side effects are.
- When you should receive the results.

We hope this leaflet answers some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact Dolphin Ward on 01227 864052.

### What is a Short Synacthen test?

A Short Synacthen test measures the amount of cortisol your child's body is able to produce.

### Why is cortisol important?

When we experience physical or emotional stress, the pituitary gland in the brain produces a hormone called ACTH. ACTH travels in the bloodstream to the adrenal glands, and makes them produce cortisol.

Cortisol has an important role in helping the body cope with stress. We need cortisol to:

- maintain normal blood pressure
- control sugar levels; and
- for our general wellbeing.

Synacthen is a medicine that has a similar effect to ACTH. It stimulates the adrenal glands to make cortisol.

### Why has my child been referred for this test?

- Children who have abnormalities of the pituitary gland may have low levels of ACTH, and therefore low cortisol levels.
- Children who have taken oral steroid medications for a long time may need this test. This is because their own body's production of steroid / cortisol may be reduced or suppressed.
- Very rarely, children can have abnormalities of the adrenal glands, and they do not produce enough cortisol.
- The Short Synacthen test checks your child's cortisol response. It will help your child's doctor plan their treatment.

### What happens if we decide not to have this test?

Without the results from this test, your doctors will have less information about your child's cortisol levels. Without the test we can only monitor your child in clinic.

### What happens before my child's test?

- Your child will have a morning appointment to come to Dolphin Ward for their test.
- They can eat and drink as normal before their test.
- **If your child is taking hydrocortisone or another oral steroid, please do not give it on the morning of their test.**
- **It is important to talk to your child about their test. Explain everything as simply as possible.**

### What happens on the day of their test?

- Please report to the reception desk in the Children's Assessment Centre at the Kent and Canterbury Hospital.
- A nurse will greet you and your child, and take you both through to Dolphin Ward for your child's test. Please use this time to ask any last minute questions. Remember that you can withdraw your consent for treatment at any time.
- You can stay with your child while they have their test.
- A nurse will apply anaesthetic cream to numb the area, before inserting a cannula into a vein. A tiny plastic tube remains in the vein. The cannula acts as a "tap", so blood can be taken repeatedly without having to keep inserting needles to collect it.
- After baseline blood tests, an injection of Synacthen is given through the cannula. Following this, a blood sample is taken at 30 minutes (and sometimes 60 minutes) to measure the cortisol response.
- The test usually takes around 2 hours to complete.
- Your child is advised to sit on their bed during the test. They are still able to do activities such as:

- crafts
- playing
- using electronic devices (such as tablets and smart phones), or
- watching TV.

Bringing things with you to help entertain your child would be helpful.

- Once the test is complete, you can go home.

### Are there any side effects to having this test?

Synacthen can cause side effects, but this is very unusual.

- Rarely, Synacthen can cause flushing and a feeling of sickness and sleepiness.
- Very rarely, patients have an allergic reaction with skin irritation, swelling, or wheeziness.

### When will the results be available?

Results are usually available 1 to 2 weeks after the test. They are usually given at your child's next outpatient appointment, or by letter or phone call.

If requested, ACTH levels usually take 3 to 4 weeks to be reported.

### Contact details

If you need to cancel or change your appointment, or you have any questions or concerns about the test, please contact Dolphin ward on 01227 864052.

### What do you think of this leaflet?

We welcome feedback, whether positive or negative, as it helps us to improve our care and services.

If you would like to give us feedback about this leaflet, please fill in our short online survey. Either scan the QR code below, or use the web link. We do not record your personal information, unless you provide contact details and would like to talk to us some more.

**Giving feedback about this leaflet**



<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/MDOBU4/>

If you would rather talk to someone instead of filling in a survey, please call the Patient Voice Team.

- **Patient Voice Team**  
Telephone: 01227 868605  
Email ([ekhuft.patientvoice@nhs.net](mailto:ekhuft.patientvoice@nhs.net))

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.**

**Please let us know:**

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

**You can let us know this by:**

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

**Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments**, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email ([ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)).

**Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital.** Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

**Further patient information leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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