

ENDOCRINE TESTING UNIT

Synacthen test - Patient Information Sheet

Your doctor has referred you to the Endocrine Testing Unit (ETU) for a Short Synacthen Test.

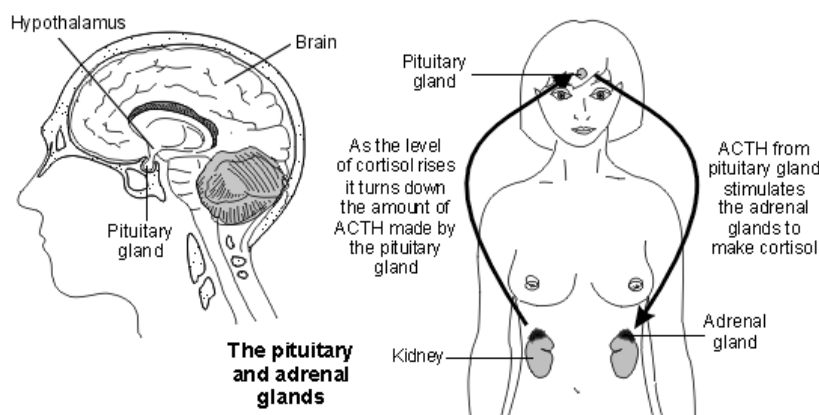
What is a short synacthen test?

A short synacthen test is conducted to see if your adrenal glands (small glands above the kidneys) are producing enough of a hormone called cortisol. The amount of cortisol that is made is controlled by another hormone called adreno-cortico-tropic hormone (ACTH) that is produced by the pituitary gland in the brain. ACTH stimulates the adrenal glands to produce cortisol.

Cortisol is a steroid hormone that is vital for health.

Its functions include:

- Helping to regulate blood pressure
- Helping to regulate the immune system
- Helping to balance the effect of insulin and blood sugar levels
- Helping the body respond to stress



Why do I need this test?

A short synacthen test is used to check the function of the adrenal glands and also to see how the hypothalamus, pituitary and adrenal glands are working together, especially after pituitary surgery. The test may also be used to diagnose Addison's disease.

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How should I prepare for this test?

- Fasting is not usually required for this test, however if your doctor wishes other fasting blood tests to be collected such as lipids or glucose, you must fast from midnight before the test.
- If you are taking steroid medication, for example prednisone or cortisone you will be asked to omit your dose 24 hours prior to the test. Please inform the booking nurse if you are on any other steroid preparations such as creams, inhalers or nasal drops or the contraceptive pill.

What will happen during the test?

The test will usually be performed between 8am and 10am in the morning. The endocrine registrar will discuss the test and have you sign a consent. The ETU nurse will insert a cannula into a vein in your arm to enable blood samples to be collected. After the baseline blood sample is taken an injection of synthetic ACTH hormone is injected into a muscle of your upper arm. Further blood samples are then taken at 30 and 60 minutes following this injection. This is to measure the levels of cortisol in the blood to see if the adrenal glands have responded to the ACTH.

You will be relaxing in a bed throughout the test so you may wish to bring a book or music to listen to, or there is a television and magazines available.

At the completion of the test the cannula will be removed and you will be offered a drink and a snack, and will be able to go home.

Are there any side effects or complication from a short synacthen test?

There are usually no side effects from this test except perhaps a small bruise where the cannula was inserted. Allergic reactions to Synacthen occur rarely. Localised discomfort at the injection site can occur. The test will be performed by a registered nurse and an Endocrine registrar will be present.

What happens after the test?

The results of the test will be available in a couple of days. Your Endocrinologist will contact you regarding the results and any changes to your treatment.

What if I have any questions?

You will have the opportunity to ask questions of the doctor prior to the test. If you would like to change any arrangements please contact the ETU Nurse Unit Manager on phone 92958231