

Short Synacthen Test (SST)

Introduction

Your doctor has recommended that you have a Short Synacthen Test (SST). This is a test to check the amount of cortisol in your body and to check how well your body can produce cortisol.

What is cortisol?

Cortisol is one of the essential steroid hormones in your body to keep you healthy. You can be unwell if this hormone is too high or too low.

Preparing for your test

- If you are taking steroid medications such as hydrocortisone, prednisolone, dexamethasone or plenadren the doctor will have advised you about stopping these medications before the test.
- If you are taking oestrogen containing medication such as the contraceptive pill or Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) you will need to stop these at least 6 weeks before the test. During this time, it is important that you consider alternative forms of contraception. If you are using an oestrogen patch, this can be continued as it will not affect the result of your test. Please contact the doctor for further advice if needed.
- You should let your doctor and the Medical Day Team know if you have severe asthma.

On the day of the SST

- Please bring the medications that you have stopped taking to your SST appointment.
- You should arrive at the Medical Day Unit for your SST test at least 5 minutes before your appointment time.
- Due to limited space, we advise you not to bring any children with you to the appointment. However, if this causes a problem then please discuss with the Medical Day Unit staff.
- You will be asked to give your next of kin details when you attend for your test.

What will happen during your test?

- You will be seated during the test.
- You will then be introduced to the person performing the test. An explanation will be given as to what to expect.
- A cannula (small flexible tube) will be inserted into a vein in your hand or arm. This will be used to take a blood sample to check the baseline level of cortisol in your body. The cannula will remain in your hand or arm until the test is complete.
- The Synacthen will be given to you via the same cannula.
- A further blood sample will be taken, via the cannula, 30 minutes after the first one. This is again to measure the cortisol in your body.
- The result will show how much cortisol you have and how well your body can respond to the stimulation.

- The test will take at least 1 hour.

What will happen after the test?

- You will be able to take your medication as usual straight after the test.
- The result of the test will take about 2 weeks and will be sent to your consultant.
- Please do not contact the Medical Day Unit for your test results as you will be contacted directly if needed.
- Your GP will also be informed of the result of your test.

Contact information

Please remember the timing of your test is important so please report directly to the Medical Day Unit 5 minutes before the time stated in your appointment letter. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please contact the unit and we will try to rearrange.

Medical Day Unit (Oakley ward)

Cheltenham General Hospital
Cheltenham
GL53 7AN

Tel: 0300 422 6614

Tel: 0300 422 6603

Monday to Saturday, 8:00am to 4:00pm

If you wish to speak to the doctor, please contact the Gloucestershire Hospitals Switchboard or refer to your past appointment letters.

Gloucestershire Hospitals Switchboard

Tel: 0300 422 2222

When prompted please ask for the operator then ask for your consultant's secretary.

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Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.

Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation.

***Ask 3 Questions** is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial.

Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>



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