

Patient information

Allergen Challenge or Provocation Tests

Allergy and Immunology Department

Following your appointment at the allergy clinic, it has been recommended that you attend an appointment for an allergen challenge. This leaflet will give you information about what will happen during the appointment.

What is an allergen challenge?

An allergen challenge involves exposure to something that you may previously have been allergic to or suspected of being allergic to such as food, medication or latex, to confirm for sure if you are truly allergic or not.

If you have a reaction to the allergen being challenged, we can quickly give medication to treat the reaction.

What happens in a challenge?

- Challenge tests can either be performed as a single dose or are graded.
- Graded challenges start with small amounts of the test substance — in this way, if you are allergic to the substance being tested, the likelihood is that the symptoms will only be mild (but still recognisable). Your clinician will decide which approach is more suitable based on your clinical history and any investigations undertaken.
- Most challenge tests take around one to three hours.

The challenge will stop when either:

- you have received a reasonable amount of the food or medication without symptoms
 - you decide you want to stop (for whatever reason)
 - you develop convincing symptoms of an allergic response. If you do have an allergic reaction, we will treat it, and we will want you to stay in the clinic until we are happy it is safe to let you go.
- Most reactions are mild and symptoms can include itching, rash (often a hive or nettle like rash) and swelling. There is a risk of a severe reaction (anaphylaxis) which can involve difficulty breathing and faintness but this is rare. Admission to hospital may be required in these cases for further observation and treatment.
 - It is natural to be anxious about this kind of allergy testing and if subjective symptoms are reported this will be discussed in full with the clinician before deciding whether to carry on.

- The benefits and the risks will be explained to you, and you will be given the opportunity to ask any questions. If you are happy to carry on you will be asked to sign a form giving your informed consent to the test. We will record some basic observations – pulse, blood pressure and breathing test (peak flow reading) before starting the challenge.

What do I need to bring and how do I prepare?

- You should stop taking any antihistamines for five days before your appointment
- If you are being challenged to a food you will need to bring this with you
 - If the food requires cooking, please do so before you attend.
 - The food should be unflavoured and unseasoned.
 - If you are being challenged to **Sesame**, please bring with you **Tahini** and you may wish to bring in a suitable cracker or biscuit that you know you tolerate with no associated symptoms.
 - If you are being challenged to **Nuts**, please bring the nuts in separate packaging so they are not cross-contaminated. The nuts should be unroasted, unsalted, unblanched and shelled, and can be found in the bakery aisle of most large supermarkets.
- You may need to stop medication you are taking if it has an antihistamine effect or could interfere with the treatment of an allergic reaction. Please discuss this with the Allergy team as soon as possible.
 - beta-blockers – medications ending in ‘-olol’ (eg bisoprolol, atenolol, carvedilol)
 - ACE inhibitors – medications ending in ‘-pril’ (eg ramipril, enalapril, perindopril)
 - amitriptyline, nortriptyline, mirtazapine, cyclizine or quetiapine
- Do not bring children or other dependent with you, as you may be unable to look after them.
- You should bring any prescribed inhalers.
- You may wish to bring something to occupy your time e.g. a book or tablet device.

Prior to your appointment if you become unwell, start a new medication or your asthma becomes poorly controlled e.g. you start to use your asthma medication more frequently, please contact us so we can assess if you should still attend.

You can eat and drink as normal on the day of the challenge.

What should I do if I develop symptoms after the challenge?

You should let us know and you will be given our contact details. You will also be given a management plan before leaving in case you have any delayed symptoms.

You should make a note of the symptoms and when they occurred, what treatment you required and how long till the symptoms resolved. It is also useful if you can take a picture, for example if there is a rash.

What if I don't want a challenge test?

Having a challenge test is entirely voluntary. You might decide you do not want to have one. Some patients prefer simply to assume they are allergic to the substance in question and avoid it in future. Clearly, this avoids any risk associated with a challenge test but leaves some doubt about whether the allergy genuinely exists.

After the challenge test

We will write to your GP and update them as to what has been done. You will also get a copy of this letter.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

If you have any concerns or queries please contact the Allergy Clinic:

Broadgreen Hospital

Tel: 0151 282 6369

Text phone number: 18001 0151 282 6332

Or email Allergy.Immunology@liverpoolft.nhs.uk

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