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Sweat Test

What is a sweat test?

A sweat test measures the amount of salt in the sweat of the patient. It is used to diagnose cystic fibrosis (CF). Patients with CF have high levels of salt in their sweat.

CF is a disease that causes mucus build-up in the lungs and other organs. It damages the lungs and makes it difficult to breathe. CF also causes frequent infections and malnutrition. It is an inherited disease, hence it can be passed on from parents to children through the genes.

Symptoms may include: salty-tasting skin, frequent coughing, frequent lung infection (bronchitis or pneumonia), difficulty in breathing, poor weight gain and greasy bulky stools.

What happens during a sweat test?

The test will be requested by the doctor and performed by PathCare whom will collect a sample of sweat for testing. The test will take about an hour to complete.

The test includes the following steps:

- The staff member will place a pilocarpine gel on the forearm, inner thigh or inner upper arm of the patient.
- A weak current will stimulate that tiny area, which causes the medicine in the gel to seep into the skin. This may cause a sense of tingling in that area.
- The electrode will be removed, sweat will be collected via a sensor.
- The sweat is analysed and the result is reported to the doctor. The doctor will discuss the outcome of the result with the parent.
- In other cases, the sweat might be collected for 30 minutes, and sent to the lab for further testing.

What do I need to prepare for the test?

The patient needs to have had a decent meal and sufficient fluids in order for the test to be successful.

Are there any risks involved?

There is no known risk to a sweat test. The patient may experience a tingling or burning sensation from the electrical current, but it will not be painful.

The possibility of a minor burn wound is 1:50 000 people.

What does the result mean?

The doctor will discuss the outcome of the result with the parent. If another test is necessary, the doctor will request a re-test in order to assist with a diagnosis.

Is there anything else I need to know about a sweat test?

CF has no cure, but there are treatments available that will reduce the symptoms to improve the quality of life for the patient.

For additional information, please consult your doctor.

