

Dermatology - Patch Tests

Patch testing is a form of allergy testing used for the investigation of eczema (sometimes referred to as dermatitis). It is used for testing for allergies to things which may have touched the skin. It is not very helpful as a test for food allergies.

Patch testing requires patients to attend 3 appointments in one week. This is likely to be Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The first appointment will take about half an hour. Tiny quantities of approximately 30 chemicals (allergens) in individual square plastic or round aluminium chambers are applied to the upper back. They are kept in place with special hypo-allergenic adhesive tape like here:



We use the sort of chemicals that people commonly come into contact with every day for example through touching coins, rubber gloves, clothes, shoes, newspaper, soaps, shampoos, make-up, household cleansers, plants, glues and items at work.

The patches stay in place undisturbed for at least 48 hours.

At the second and third appointment, the area is reviewed to monitor which materials have caused a reaction on the skin.

Patch testing does not involve needles but the adhesive patches stuck on the back can feel uncomfortable. A strong reaction can be very itchy. Men with hairy backs usually find removal of the tape rather uncomfortable.