

FAMILY ALLERGY & ASTHMA CONSULTANTS
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ALLERGY SKIN TESTING

Why are skin tests performed? Skin testing forms an important part in detecting sensitivities a person may have to various substances. Some of the substances that one can be skin tested for include pollens of trees, grasses, weeds, molds, animal dander, house dust, food substances, etc

What is the procedure involved in skin testing? In general terms skin testing consists of applying small quantities of liquid extracts of various substances on the forearm or on the back and gently pricking the superficial skin through them (prick test). At other times it may consist of introducing small amounts of extracts into superficial layers of skin with a very fine needle and syringe (intradermal test).

Is it painful? Due to special technique and needles used in testing, as a rule, most patients find the procedure somewhat uncomfortable but not very painful. These are not “shots” such as tetanus or diphtheria “shots”. One typically feels a minor pinch. We do, however, expect children particularly in the age group of 2 to 5 years to “resist” this procedure due to apprehension. To make the procedure more comfortable we could prescribe EMLA cream (which may not be covered by all insurance companies). When applied about an hour before the procedure it numbs the skin. Please note however, that in our experiences EMLA at times numbs the skin only partially and not completely. We recommend that parents inform the child ahead of time what to expect and reassure them. This goes a long way to allay any apprehension.

How many skin tests will be performed? The number and type of substances chosen for skin tests and the technique selected for testing is individualized for each patient. You will be tested to important Northeast Florida airborne allergens and, if necessary, some foods. No two allergic patients are exactly alike. Some patients may need more and some fewer skin tests than others. Infants and young children usually need far fewer tests than teenagers and adults.

How long does it take to complete skin testing evaluation? Skin tests are completed in one or more visits depending on the age, sensitivity of the patient and other factors. Each testing session lasts about forty-five minutes. Results of skin tests are read at the end of each session. *However, since negative prick test may be repeated with intradermal technique, we prefer to give you a full report of your sensitivities only at the completion of all testing sessions.*

What happens after skin testing is completed? Results of skin tests need to be interpreted with caution. Age, clues obtained during interrogation, laboratory test results and several other factors are taken into consideration. On completion of the testing, the doctor will discuss relevant sensitivities with you along with his impressions and suggestions for the management of your problem. A list of your sensitivities will be given to you.

DO NOT USE Any prescription or over-the-counter antihistamines 3-4 days prior to the scheduled skin testing. These include cold tablets, sinus tablets, hay fever medications, or oral treatments for itchy skin. Some of the names of these drugs include Actifed, Alavert, Claritin, Drixoral, Dimetapp, Dristan, Ornade, Benadryl, Rondec, Trinalin, and many others. If you have any questions whether or not you are using an antihistamine, please ask the nurse or the doctor. Discontinue Allegra, Clarinex, Claritin and Zyrtec 4 days prior to skin tests.

Antihistamine nasal sprays such as Astelin need to be stopped for 1 week prior to testing.

Certain medications will also interfere with skin testing because they have “antihistamine-like” properties. These would include the tricyclic antidepressants (Elavil/Adapin/Sinequan/Surmontil/Tofranil/Amitriptyline/etc.). If you are taking one of these types of medications or certain tranquilizers, please notify us so that we can determine whether skin testing can be done.

These medications should not be stopped unless you have discussed it with us.

If your condition requires continuous administration of any of the above medications or if you have a question about a certain medication, please notify us so that we may discuss this with you and determine whether skin testing needs to be postponed.

YOU MAY CONTINUE

*Intranasal corticosteroid sprays such as Flonase, Rhinocort, Nasonex, Beconase, Vancenase or Nasacort.

Decongestants such as Sudafed are not contraindicated. Afrin type sprays may be used temporarily.

*Asthma inhalers (Intal, Beclovent, Vanceril, Aerobid, Atrovent, Azmacort, Alupent, Albuterol, Proventil, Ventolin, Serevent, Advair.

*Oral theophylline such as Theo-Dur, T-Phyl, Uniphyl, Theo-24, etc.)

*Antileukotriene (Singulair, Accolate).

*Low dose oral corticosteroids such as prednisone, Pediapred, Prelone.

Most drugs do not interfere with skin testing but make certain that your physician and nurse know about every drug you are taking.

Potential Adverse Effects to Skin Testing

- A. LOCAL - If you have a specific allergic sensitivity to one of the allergens, a red, raised, itchy hive like eruption (caused by histamine release into the skin) will appear on your skin within 15 to 20 minutes. These positive reactions will gradually disappear over a period of 30 to 60 minutes, and typically, no treatment is necessary. Occasionally local swelling at a test site will begin 4 to 8 hours after the skin tests are applied, particularly at sites of intradermal testing. These reactions are not serious and will disappear over the next couple of days. However they should be measured and reported to us. Ice, Benadryl cream and/or 1% Cortaid could be applied to the site for relief.
- B. OTHER - Other symptoms may consist of any or all of the following symptoms: itchy eyes, nose, or throat, nasal congestion; runny nose, tightness in the throat or chest, increased wheezing, lightheadedness, faintness, nausea and vomiting; hives and generalized itching. Very rarely the reaction can be severe enough to cause shock or be life threatening. The staff is trained and emergency equipment is available to treat them.

The same guidelines apply if you are scheduled for testing to antibiotics, local anesthetics, venoms or other biological agents.

We request that you do not bring small children with you when you are scheduled for skin testing unless they are accompanied by another adult who can sit with them in the reception area.

If for any reasons you need to change your skin test appointment, please give us at least 48 hours notice so that another patient may avail of the time reserved for your testing.