

## Allergen Patch Test - FAQs

### What is Allergic Contact Dermatitis?

Allergic contact dermatitis is a common inflammatory reaction that occurs when substances you are allergic to come in contact with your skin. Substances that cause allergic reactions are called allergens. Common allergens may include cosmetics or after shaves, metals in jewelry, laundry detergents, skin and hair products, rubber gloves or boots, etc. Allergic contact dermatitis may manifest as a reddening, swelling, drying or cracking of the skin.

### How is Allergic Contact Dermatitis diagnosed?

The doctor will first take a thorough medical history and physical exam to determine the possibility of allergic contact dermatitis. The doctor may suggest that you undergo an allergen patch test to help distinguish the specific type and cause of the contact dermatitis. The patch test consists of one negative control and a panel of 23 well-known causes of allergic contact dermatitis. This test will help determine whether your skin rash is allergic contact dermatitis and not another condition such as psoriasis or eczema.

### How is the patch test done?

Two panels of different allergens are applied on a small area on the upper back. The area is then covered so it is watertight. The patch test is usually left on your back for two days. After the patch has been on the skin for 48 hours, you will return to the office for a brief evaluation and interpretation of the results. You may also need to return at 72 or 96 hours for a second or third reading if deemed necessary by your health care provider. You will be given information on any allergens that tested positive and will meet with the doctor to review your results.

### What should I know before the test date?

Before you have a patch test performed, you should:

1. NOT use topical corticosteroids (i.e., hydrocortisone) on the test area for two weeks before the test date.
2. Minimize sun exposure before the test date.
3. NOT apply lotions, creams, or ointments to the test area before testing.
4. NOT scrub or shave tested areas (e.g., upper back).
5. Avoid non-steroidal topical immunosuppressives on the back for two weeks prior to testing.

Please note that you may use antihistamines prior to testing.

### Should I take precautions during the test period?

You should:

1. Keep the patch test area (upper back) dry. Avoid activities that cause perspiration and do NOT take a bath or shower until after your health care provider removes the patch test. You may sponge bathe around the patch test site.
2. Wear loose clothing.
3. Call our office (508) 854-1380 x 307, if you experience severe itching or burning at the test site, or if the patch becomes loose.
4. NOT do any physical activity that will cause heavy perspiration.

### What is the treatment for allergic contact dermatitis?

The primary goal is to avoid the substances which cause the allergic contact dermatitis. Your doctor will provide information on common sources of these allergens as well as places where you are likely to come into contact with these substances in the environment. Once the allergens have been identified you should read the ingredient list on product labels before purchasing or using them. Also, information on alternative substances or products may be provided as well.