Sweat Test Fact Sheet

What is the sweat test?

A test to measure the amount of chloride in the sweat of people suspected of having cystic fibrosis (CF). It is a painless, simple and most often and accurate test to assist in the diagnosis of CF.

People with CF have a problem with transporting salt across cell membranes. This results in higher concentration of chloride in sweat compared to those without CF. The sweat test is used to assist in diagnosis of CF and can be done on people of any age. Some infants may not produce enough sweat at the first test and it will be repeated.

How is the sweat test done?

A sweat sample is collected using a sweat stimulation procedure by placing a chemical on the skin, usually the arm or leg. An electrode is then put over that area on the skin and this stimulates sweat production. Sweat is then collected on a piece of gauze or filter paper for 20 – 30 minutes and sent to a laboratory for analysis of chloride concentration. It usually takes about an hour for the test to be done. The arm or leg area that has been stimulated may remain red for a few hours after the test.

When is the sweat test done?

Screening for CF is part of the Australian newborn screening program (Guthrie/ heel prick test). The sweat test is usually done between 3 – 6 weeks of age in babies with a positive newborn screening test as part of the follow up process to the screening process. Some times more than one sweat test is needed.

What to do before the test

It is best not to apply cream or lotion to the skin 24 hours before the test. Babies should be fed their usual feed at the regular time.

The result of the sweat test

If your baby is being tested because of the newborn screening test result, the sweat test results will be explained to you by a doctor at the CF clinic.

Useful Resources

http://www.labtestsonline.org.au/learning/test-index/sweat-test

Contact your local CF office

Cystic Fibrosis Australia
Unit 26, 5 Inglewood Place
Norwest Business Park
Baulkham Hills 2153

Postal Address
PO Box 8007
Baulkham Hills NSW 2153

T: +61 (0) 2 8883 4477
F: +61 (0) 2 8883 5515
E: general@cfa.org.au