



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Preparing for a Blood Test

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Department of Clinical Biochemistry

① For more information, please contact:

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Why is a Blood Sample Needed?

Blood tests have a wide range of purposes and are one of the most common types of medical test. For example, a blood test can be used to assess your general state of health, check if you have an infection or see how well certain organs such as the liver and kidneys are functioning.

Most blood tests only take a few minutes to complete and are carried out at your GP surgery or local hospital by a doctor, nurse or phlebotomist (a specialist in taking blood samples).

For more information about blood tests please visit <http://labtestsonline.org.uk/> or contact your healthcare provider.

Preparing for a Blood Test

In the vast majority of cases you do not need to prepare for a blood test. If you do need to make preparations, the healthcare professional who is requesting your blood tests will provide you with special instructions that you will need to follow before your test. For instance, you may be asked to avoid eating or drinking (except water) for up to 12 hours before your blood test. This is known as a fasting blood test. You may also be told not to drink alcohol or not to smoke before your test.

In some cases, you may be asked to stop taking a certain medication. Although you may be taking a medication that could affect the results of a blood test, this does not necessarily mean that you need to stop taking it. Your doctor may be able to interpret the results of the blood test taking the effects of the medication into account. If you are unsure, continue your medicine as prescribed until you have checked with your doctor. Herbal remedies, vitamins or supplements can also affect results, so if you take any of these then please tell your doctor.

It is important to follow the instructions you are given as this may affect the result of the test and mean that it needs to be repeated.

What happens during a Blood Test?

A blood test usually involves taking a blood sample from a blood vessel in your inner elbow or wrist where the veins are relatively close to the surface. In children, blood is often taken from the back of the hand. The person taking the blood test may clean the area with an antiseptic wipe beforehand. For children, the skin may be numbed with a special spray or cream before the sample is taken.

Before the blood test, the person taking the sample should ask you to confirm your full name and date of birth to ensure they are collecting the sample from the correct person. A tight band (tourniquet) is placed around your upper arm. This temporarily slows the flow of blood and causes the vein to swell making it easier to collect the sample. A needle attached to a syringe or special container is then inserted into the vein and a sample of your blood is collected. You may feel a slight pricking or scratching sensation as the needle penetrates the skin. If you don't like needles or blood, tell the person who is taking the sample so they can make you more comfortable.

When the sample has been taken, the needle will be removed. Pressure is then applied to the skin for a few minutes using a cotton wool pad. A plaster may also be applied to the area.

After the Blood Test

Only a small amount of blood is taken during the test so you should not feel any significant side effects. However, some people feel dizzy and faint during and after the test. If this has happened in the past, tell the person who is taking the sample so they can help you feel more comfortable. Following the test you may develop a small bruise. Whilst bruises can be painful, they are usually harmless and fade after a few days.

Blood Test Results

During the test, your blood will be transferred to a special tube and labelled with your name and date of birth. The special tube will then be sent to a laboratory where testing will be performed. In some cases the result will be ready the same day or a few days afterwards. However, in other cases results may not be available for a few weeks. Please do not contact the laboratory directly for your test results. Your results will be sent to the doctor or nurse who requested the test.

Sometimes, receiving results can be stressful and upsetting. If you are worried about the outcome of a test, you may wish to take a trusted friend or relative with you for support. For some tests (e.g. HIV or genetic testing) you will be offered specialist counselling to help you deal with your results.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:
Claire Lloyd, Clinical Scientist (Biochemistry),
The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or
telephone 01904 726098.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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