



Endocrine Department

Synacthen Test

Information for parents and carers

Introduction

This leaflet aims to provide you with some information about Endocrine Tests; what they involve and how long they take. Endocrine tests measure the amount of hormones produced by the body. Hormones are responsible for the control of body functions as well as growth and development.

A number of special tests allow us to look at individual hormone levels or all the hormones levels together.

Synacthen Test

This test is performed to check if the adrenal glands are producing the right amount of the hormone cortisol. The Adrenal glands are located in the abdomen (tummy) one lying above each kidney.

The adrenals produce a number of hormones including cortisol. Cortisol is one of the body's main steroid hormones and one of its most important functions is to help the body cope with stress such as illness, infection, surgery or trauma. Patients with suspected or confirmed low cortisol levels may be asked to have a Synacthen test. This will establish if the adrenals are working normally.

What will happen?

For all endocrine tests we give drugs to stimulate the gland – in this case to produce cortisol. We then take a series of blood samples at timed intervals to measure the cortisol levels. This is to check that the glands are working properly.

How will it happen?

The most convenient way to give the drugs and take the samples is by placing a plastic needle (cannula) with a valve (tap) attached in a vein. This is usually on the back of the hand or elbow.

We can apply a local anesthetic cream on the back of the hand or elbow before doing the test to prevent pain or discomfort. We will wait for the cream to work, before inserting the cannula.

Can my child eat and drink before the test?

Yes.

How long will the test take?

The test should last approximately two hours throughout the course of the morning. Once the cannula is in place your child can sit in an arm chair, watch TV or DVD's.

Are there any side effects?

Like all medicines, Synacthen can cause side effects although not everyone gets them.

