

Skin Testing For Allergies

Frequently Asked Questions

What Is An Allergy Test?

An allergy skin test, also called a scratch test, is used to identify the substances that are causing your allergy symptoms. It is performed by applying an extract of allergen to your skin, scratching or pricking the skin to allow exposure, and then evaluating the skin's reaction.

What Happens During The Test?

First a doctor or nurse will examine the skin on your forearm and clean it with alcohol.

Areas on your skin are then marked with a pen to identify each allergen that will be tested. A drop of extract for each potential allergen—such as pollen and animal dander—is placed on the corresponding mark.

A small disposable pricking device is then used so the extract can enter into the outer layer of the skin, called the epidermis. The skin prick is not a shot and does not cause bleeding.

If there are allergic antibodies in your system, your skin will become irritated and may itch, much like a mosquito bite. This reaction means you are allergic to that substance.

How Long Does The Test Last?

It takes approximately one hour for the entire appointment. The allergen placement takes 5 to 10 minutes. Then you will have to wait about 15 minutes to see how your skin reacts.

How Can I Prepare For The Test?

Inform the healthcare provider who is going to perform the skin test about all medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medications.

Since over-the-counter antihistamines stop allergic reactions, you should not take them for five days before the test. Talk to your doctor about discontinuing your prescription medications prior to the test.

Your doctor will give you a list of medicines to avoid before the test, since there are other drugs that can interfere with the results. Since you may not be able to discontinue certain medicines, the doctor or nurse may perform a separate “control” test to determine if that particular drug will interfere with the scratch test.

Will It Hurt?

The testing may be mildly irritating, but most people say it doesn't hurt too much.

Is The Test Safe?

Although small amounts of allergens are introduced into your system, a skin test is completely safe when performed properly.