

Dr Wakelin's Patch Test Information for Private Patients

Patch testing has been recommended to investigate your skin complaint. This leaflet explains what the tests involve and answers some common questions. Please read it carefully and ask me if you have any concerns.

Why are patch tests done?

Patch tests help find out if a rash is caused by delayed allergy to a substance ('allergen') that come into contact with the skin i.e., **skin contact allergy**. Allergens include nickel in jewellery, perfumes (including natural fragrances), nail polish, hair dye, and ingredients in skin care products and medicated creams. Patch tests do *not* investigate food allergy. If you need testing to unusual allergens such as oral medication or work chemicals, please arrange to see me for an initial clinic consultation as these allergens will need to be pre-ordered.

Delayed contact allergy rashes take several days to appear and this time lag can make them difficult to identify. You can also become allergic to something after using it for several years without problem as well as creams that feel soothing when they are first applied. Patch tests are the best test to test many allergens and find out if you have a skin contact allergy. This can't be done by a blood test.

How can I book to have a patch test?

If you have already seen me as a private patient, you can book the patch tests directly as below.

If you have been referred to me by another consultant dermatologist /allergist, you will need to send their referral letter to my PA. If you have not seen a specialist and want to have patch tests, please arrange an initial consultation with me so I can assess and treat your skin problem and explain the tests in more detail and whether they can help.

When are the patch test clinics held and why do I need three visits?

All clinics are held at **Skin Health & Allergy, OneWelbeck**, London. Appointments can be made direct via OneWelbeck by bookings.skinhealthallergy@onewelbeck.com / tel. 0203 653 2007 (press option 1) or by leaving a message with my PA as below. Please arrive at least 10 minutes before your first appointment, to complete the clinic registration form. Please ensure you have all your insurance details including membership number and preauthorization if using private insurance.

The tests involve **3 visits in a single week** (see below) and a **pre-test telephone consultation with me**.

- Your **telephone consultation** is on **Monday morning** and involves a **15 minute discussion** about your rash and potential allergens so the relevant allergen tests can be prepared before your visit.
- On the 1st clinic visit (**Monday afternoon**), I will examine your skin and our nurse will apply allergens to your skin using hypoallergenic dressings ('patches'). These are usually put on the back or upper arms. They are sticky and can feel mildly itchy /uncomfortable. Please wear old, dark / black clothing as the ink used to outline the patches can stain fabric. Please do not moisturise your back or the patches won't stick.
- On your 2nd visit (**Wednesday afternoon**) the patches are removed and I examine your skin to see if there are any early reactions. Sometimes, extra patches or repeat patches are applied at this visit.
- On your 3rd visit (**Friday afternoon**) I examine your skin again because contact allergies can take several days to appear. I will advise about any allergies I have identified and how to avoid these in the future. You will also be sent a report summarizing the test results. I will explain about late allergy reactions and how to contact me if this happens.

**** You will need to keep your back completely DRY from Monday until the tests finish on Friday ****

This means **not getting any water on your back from showering, swimming or bathing** and **avoiding all strenuous exercise** (gym, tennis, running) because the patches may fall off or move if your skin gets wet / sweaty and this spoils the tests. Please also avoid excessive stretching such as yoga.

What should I bring with me?

Please bring any **moisturisers, medicated creams (e.g., steroids)** and the **cosmetics / toiletries** that you have used on the **affected area of skin**. If you have hand eczema, please bring your gloves as it may help to test you to **small** samples of these.

Do any forms of medication spoil the tests? What about a sun tan?

Please continue your regular medication during the patch tests, including antihistamines as these do not affect patch tests. The tests are unreliable if you are taking steroid tablets (Prednisolone) – please discuss with your dermatologist if needed. They are also unreliable if you have recently had UV therapy or have sunbathed your back within the month before the tests. Please book the tests to be done after your tan has faded.

Can I also have skin prick tests?

I can also do basic tests to see if you are allergic to common airborne allergens (to dust, pollens, cat, dog) and latex if indicated. These allergens cause rapid allergy and are investigated with skin prick tests. This is completely different from a patch test. I usually offer skin prick tests on your Wednesday / second visit.

If you are having skin prick tests, please stop taking antihistamines for at least 48 hours before the test.

Please note that I do not do skin prick tests for food, insect venom or drug allergy.

Are there any risks or side effects of patch testing?

Patch testing is a long-established, reliable and very safe form of allergy testing. Possible side effects include:

- **Irritation** of the skin due to the adhesive tape (usually settles in a few days).
- **Strong allergic reactions** (itchy, bumpy areas of skin about the size of a finger nail; occasionally weepy) which can last for several weeks and may leave pigment change (lighter or darker skin) or very rarely, scarring.
- **New chemical allergies** can rarely be triggered by the tests (less than 1 in 500 people).

Patch tests are not usually done during pregnancy unless essential though they are not known to cause harm. Please discuss with your dermatologist if necessary.

Is there an age limit ?

Skin contact allergy can affect people of all ages and can develop at any time in life. I patch offer patch tests for people aged 16 and over. Please contact the appointments team if you need advice on allergy testing for children under 16.

Further advice and appointments

For further information please contact the appointments team (**0203 653 2007 – option 1**) or leave a message with my PA (**07517 045234**). Please also see my website **drsarahwakelin.co.uk** for further information about patch testing, eczema and skin allergies.