

# Hydrogen & Methane Breath Testing

Information for patients



Abdominal Medicine  
and Surgery

## Introduction

### What are hydrogen and methane breath tests?

Hydrogen and methane breath tests are used to diagnose small intestinal bacterial overgrowth - an abnormal growth of bacteria in the part of bowel just after your stomach. This condition can cause diarrhoea, bloating, weight loss and excess wind.

These tests are also used to diagnose intolerance to certain sugars such as lactose.

In both small intestinal bacterial overgrowth and sugar intolerance the levels of hydrogen and/or methane gas in your breath are unusually high after eating. We will be testing the amount of these gases in your breath.

### Why do I need these tests?

These tests have been requested by your consultant so they can try to understand the cause of your bowel symptoms and decide on appropriate treatment.

## Before your procedure

**Please contact the department if you are diabetic, on antibiotics or have recently had (or scheduled for) a colonoscopy.**

### Is any preparation needed?

#### *The day before the test*

Do not eat or drink anything 12 hours before your test. This includes water; however, any urgent medications can be taken with a small amount of water at the usual time.

The day before your test you need to maintain a low fibre diet, avoiding beans, bran, high fibre cereal, fruit, brown bread, brown rice, brown pasta and vegetables as these can affect the results of the test. Examples of food and drink which do not affect the test include white bread, red meat, chicken, fish, Quorn, eggs, potatoes without the skin, cheese, tea and coffee.

Please also stop any fibre supplements (e.g. fybogel) the day before the test.

#### *The day of the test*

Brush your teeth thoroughly before attending the clinic and bring your toothbrush and toothpaste with you.

Do not smoke, exercise or sleep 30 minutes before the test.

## During your procedure

### Upon arrival

Upon arrival to the department (see attached map for directions) you will then have an interview with the physiologist to discuss your symptoms and the test. You will be given the opportunity at this point to ask any questions you may have.

You may be asked to brush your teeth again.

### What will happen during the tests?

The physiologist performing the test will take a breath sample from you by asking you to blow (exhale) into a small bag. You will then be given a sugary drink and samples of your breath will be taken every 20 minutes after this. The test can take three hours so feel free to bring something to do or read.

**You must not eat, drink, chew gum, smoke, exercise or sleep during the test.**

## Risks, benefits and alternatives

Breath tests are simple, safe and non-invasive. There are no reported risks with these tests though it is important that diabetics contact the department for instructions regarding blood sugar control and medications.

The test will hopefully help your consultant better understand and manage your symptoms. There are no direct alternatives to this test offered in this trust.

## After your procedure

### What will happen after my tests?

Once your tests are complete you will be free to leave the department, resume your normal diet and any medications you stopped for the test.

### When will I find out the results?

The Physiologist performing your tests may explain some of the findings, but the full report will be sent to your consultant who will discuss them with you at your next out-patient appointment. Your results will not be sent to your GP.

### What if I have any other questions?

This leaflet is only a short account on breath testing. If you require more information, have any special requirements or need to reschedule your appointment for a later date, please contact the Gastrointestinal Physiology Department on:

**0113 206 4268 (8:30am - 4:00pm)**