

Skin Patch Tests

Allergy and Dermatology Patch Test Clinic (ADPT)

Why have skin patch testing?

The cause of an allergy is usually found based on:

- Your symptoms, a rash is very common.
- A history of contact with substances that cause the allergy.
These substances are called allergens.

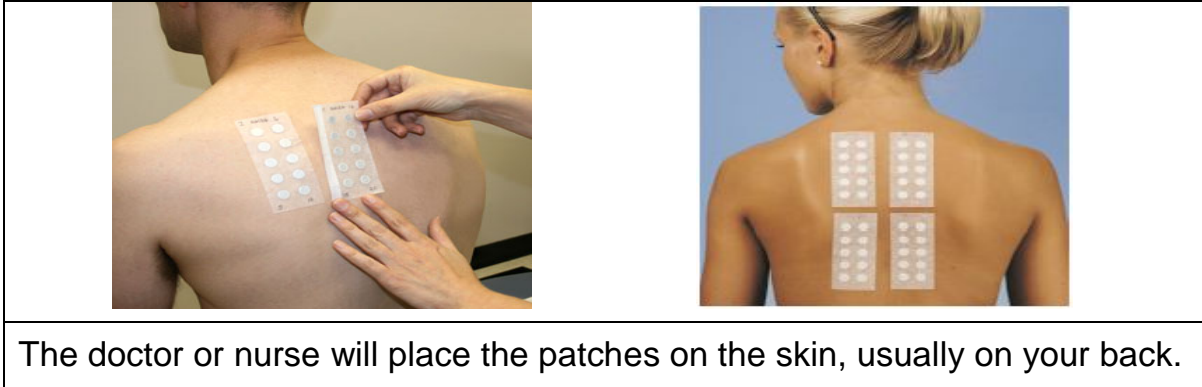
When the cause of an allergy is not clear, a skin patch test may be done to help find the cause of your allergy. Skin patch tests are done to see if a certain substance is causing an allergic skin reaction.

Your family doctor has recommended a skin patch test at the **Allergy and Dermatology Patch Test Clinic (ADPT)**. This clinic is located at McMaster University Medical Centre. The results from the skin patch tests, may be able to confirm what the substance that is causing your allergy.

You and the doctor who referred you to the clinic will receive a letter giving detailed information on the substances you are allergic to. Once the information is known, then you and the referring doctor will figure out a treatment plan that works best for you. The treatment plan is mainly about avoiding the substances or allergens that cause your allergy.

How is a skin patch test done?

You will come to the clinic for your skin patch test. After a physical exam and a discussion of your medical history, skin patches are applied. Each skin patch has a different allergen (a substance that causes allergy). Skin patch tests do not use needles. Many types of allergens are tested. These allergens can be: latex, medications, fragrances, preservatives, hair dyes, metals, and resins such as tree sap or chemicals.



You wear the patches for 48 hours (2 days). During this time the patches must stay dry. You cannot get the patches wet. **No water or sweat on the patches!** During this time no sports or exercise. If you work where it is common to sweat, you may have to go on light duty. We will discuss this with you during your visit.

After you have worn the patches for 2 days, you will return to the clinic and the patches are removed. The skin is checked and marked where the patches were applied. If the skin under the patch is mildly inflamed (light red) when the patch is removed, you may have an irritative dermatitis (rash). This is not an allergy. We cannot tell in this visit if there has been an allergic reaction. It will take 4 days for a patch test reaction to show up. You will need to come back 2 days later for a final check up. During these 2 days you can return to your usual activities, but **you cannot get wet or sweaty.**

Results

On the 4th day, inflamed (bright red skin) with or without blisters means a positive skin test. You are probably allergic to the substance on the patch. Negative skin tests mean that you are probably not allergic to the tested substances. Patch testing is not 100% accurate. This means that there is a small chance that the results are not always correct. To determine if you are allergic to a certain substance, the doctor needs to make sure that the results of the patch test fit with your medical history and physical exam.

Are skin patches safe?

Skin patch tests are generally safe for adults, children of all ages and infants. The amount of allergen used is very tiny, so patch tests are safe for people with severe allergies. A patch test does not cause a life-threatening reaction.

Who cannot have a patch test?

Sometimes, a skin patch test is not recommended. The health provider at ADPT may advise against skin patch testing if you:

- have an active allergic reaction. The patch test could trigger more skin reaction.
- have skin conditions such as severe eczema or psoriasis on large areas of your back. Your back must be free of any active rash at the time of testing.
- are taking medications that could interfere with the test results. Some of these medications can be: antihistamines, many antidepressants and heartburn medications.
- got a sunburn or light therapy on your back up to 1 week before the patches are applied.

How do I prepare for skin patch testing?

- Meet with your family doctor or specialist, before making an appointment at the ADPT, to discuss all of your medications including prescription, non-prescription, vitamins and herbal. You may have to stop certain medications for up to 10 days before the test.
- The referring doctor will tell you if you need to stop taking your medication to prepare for your skin patch test or if it is better to continue taking these medications.
- Do not get sun or light therapy on your back for at least 1 week before the patches are applied.

Preparing for your skin patch testing appointment can help you make the most of your time.

- Make a list of all medications you take: prescription, non-prescription, vitamins and supplements.
- Write down a description of your symptoms, when they first appeared and whether they occur in a pattern.
- Write down the questions you have for us.

Questions the doctor or nurse will ask you during your first visit. Your answers can help us with collecting your medical information:

- When did your symptoms begin?
- Have your symptoms changed over time?
- What at home treatments have you used?
- How did those treatments work?
- What, if anything, appears to make your symptoms worse?
- Do allergies run in your family?

Plan your schedule

Patches are applied on Monday, and then you return on Wednesday for patch removal and Friday for final reading. On Wednesday wear an old or dark coloured shirt. We mark the back after the patches are removed and the ink may rub off on your clothing.

Day	Length of visit	During the visit	Special care
Monday	30 to 60 minutes	Discussion about the history of your rash/symptoms. Physical exam. Patches applied.	No water or sweat on the patches for 2 days.
Wednesday	Short visit 10 to 15 minutes	Patches removed.	Wear an old or dark shirt to this visit. No water or sweat for 2 more days.
Friday	30 to 60 minutes	Results discussed and handouts provided.	

What if I need to cancel my appointment?

Please give us 48 hours notice if you need to cancel your appointment. Skin patch testing takes time for us to prepare and it is expensive. We may charge a \$75.00 fee if you do not cancel 48 hours before your appointment.

Questions

Before you call with questions, please read the **Post Dermatology Care Information** pamphlet provided. If you have any questions about skin patch testing, please call and ask to speak with Dr. Wasserman or Dr. Lima's nurse **on Wednesdays only**. Phone: 905-521-2100, ext. 76165