functional GUT GROUP

Hydrogen & methane breath test

Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO)

Information for patients



What is a hydrogen & methane breath test?

A hydrogen and methane breath test is used to detect abnormal growth of bacteria in the small intestine (Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth - SIBO) which can cause a variety of symptoms including diarrhoea, nausea, bloating, gas and abdominal cramps.

The breath test detects hydrogen and methane, which are gases produced by intestinal bacteria. Bacteria normally found in the large intestine produce these gases through fermentation of carbohydrates/sugars.

In SIBO, these bacteria move into the small intestine, meaning they break down the sugars before the body has had chance to digest them. This causes an over-production of gases such as hydrogen and methane.

These gases are absorbed into the bloodstream and transported to the lungs. They are then exhaled by the lungs and can be collected in breath samples for analysis.

Are there any risks associated with this test?

There are no risks involved in performing this test, you may experience some of your usual symptoms during the test, this is normal.

What preparation is required for your test?

For 4 weeks before your test

Do not take any antibiotics.

For 2 weeks before your test

Do not take GLP-1 injections

For 1 week before your test

Do not take laxatives or stool softeners
Movicol, Dulcolax, Ex-Lax, Senna, Milk of Magnesia etc.

Do not take stool bulking agents
Metamucil, citrucel etc.

Do not take motility agents
Prucalopride, linaclotide etc.

Do not take probiotics
VSL#3, Actimel, Yakult etc.

You can continue taking any other essential medicines.

Additionally, there must be a period of one week between any tests which require cleansing of the bowel e.g. colonoscopy, barium enema, before having a breath test.

The day before your test

You must follow the 'white food diet' which consists of only the following foods and drinks:

- Plain white bread
- Plain white rice
- White potatoes (no skin)
- Baked/grilled chicken, turkey, lean beef, lean pork, white fish (no oily fish)

- Maximum of 2 eggs
- Water (non-carbonated)
- Non-flavoured black coffee (no milk)
- Non-flavoured black tea (no milk and no herbal teas)
- 1 tsp butter/margarine/oil
- Salt to flavour food

Do not eat or drink anything else, eating prohibited foods could give false results for the test.

For 12 hours before your test

You must stop eating and drinking and fast for 12 hours before your test.

On the day of your test

You can have small sips of water (maximum of 300 ml) until the start of your test.

You may take your essential medicines with a small amount of water but make sure you do not take anything that may affect your bowel (see previous list).

You may brush your teeth, but please try not to swallow any toothpaste.

Do not eat, drink, chew gum, smoke, eat breath mints and/or other sweets on the morning of or during of your test.

If you are diabetic requiring insulin or diabetes medicine, please ask your doctor if you should change your morning dose. Oral hypoglycaemic medicines are usually not taken that morning until completion of the test and you start eating again.

Key Do Do not Additional info

The test kit will be sent out in the post and you can return the samples by post.

What happens during your test?

1. You should have followed the diet and had nothing to eat for the 12 hours prior to your test.

2. You will give a baseline breath test sample by blowing into a test tube with the provided straw.

3. You will mix the test substrate (lactulose or glucose) with water and drink it.

4. You will give a breath sample every 15 minutes for 2 hours and 15 minutes. Please do not eat, chew gum, smoke, sleep or exercise during your test.

Your test will last 2 hours and 15 minutes.

After your test you are free to return to your usual diet, medication and daily activity.

How will I get my results?

Your results will be sent by secure email to both you and your referring consultant/doctor.
We aim to send out all patient results within five working days of completion of your test.

London
8 Dorset Square
London
NW1 6PU

T: +44 (0) 207 486 7777
E: admin@thefunctionalgutclinic.com

Manchester
City Labs 1.0
0 Nelson St
Manchester
M13 9NQ

T: +44 (0) 161 302 7777
E: admin@thefunctionalgutclinic.com

Cambridge
63 Bateman Street
Cambridge
Cambridgeshire
CB2 1LR

T: +44 (0) 207 486 7777
E: admin@thefunctionalgutclinic.com

thefunctionalgutclinic.com

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