Anorectal Physiology tests

You have been asked to attend this test for problems associated with faecal incontinence or constipation, or other bowel problems.

Your Consultant has requested these tests so that he/she can establish what exactly is causing your particular problem. He/she can then offer the most appropriated treatment.

Anorectal physiology tests are used to assess the function of the muscles in your anal canal to see if they are working normally, and also checks the sensitivity of the rectum to small volumes of air and its response to distension.

This leaflet outlines what to expect both during and after the test.

Upon arrival

When you arrive you will be greeted and taken into a private room by the GI physiologist who will be performing the test. A chaperone may also be present to assist in the test. The GI physiologist will ask you some questions about the symptoms you have been having and take a brief history. He/She will also take this opportunity to answer any questions you may have or concerns regarding the test.
What does the test involve?

- You will be asked to undress from the waist down, put on a gown and lie, covered with a sheet, on your left side. Every effort will be made to preserve your privacy and dignity during the procedure.
- The investigator will perform a gentle rectal examination and ask you to push and squeeze to check how your muscles are working.
- A small tube (catheter) about the size of a pencil with a small soft balloon on the end is then placed into your rectum. This measures the strength of the muscles.
- Next, small volumes of air will then be introduced into the small balloon attached to the end of the catheter and you will be asked to record your sensations as this is done.
- Dependant on how your anorectum muscles work, you may be asked to do a second part of the test known as “Biofeedback” in which the GI physiologist will show you the pressures that your sphincters generate in various exercises and means to improve them. (Please note you may not require this part of the test).
- At this point the investigator will usually analyse the results obtained so far and discuss the findings with you.
Frequently asked questions

How shall I prepare for the test?

No special preparation is necessary. You may eat and drink as normal before and after the test and take any prescribed medications as normal.

Are there any risks associated with these tests?

- The test may be a little uncomfortable but should not be painful.
- There is a very small risk of perforation of the anorectum, however, this is unlikely as the catheter used is small and very smooth. The GI physiologist performing the test is also very experienced and has specialist training.
- If you have a latex allergy, you will need to notify the GI physiologist before your appointment to ensure latex free gloves and a balloon is used.
- If you have any further concerns please contact the GI physiology department on 0117 414 8801.
What happens after I have had the test?
The GI physiologist will explain the basic findings of your test and a report will be send to your consultant. You may be asked to return for a follow up appointment or a telephone follow up may be arranged if required. There is no sedation involved in the tests so you should be able to drive home immediately afterwards.

How long does the test take?
The appointment is for an hour however the test itself usually takes 20 minutes. This allows time for you to ask any questions you may have and for the physiologist to give you some advice to help improve your symptoms if necessary.

Are there any alternatives to the test?
There are no alternatives to these investigations. They are simple and minimally invasive.

What will happen after your tests?
You will be able to resume normal activities following the tests.
Further appointments

If you require any additional information concerning the investigations or any advice please contact us using the details on the back page:

If unavailable please leave a message and you will be contacted.
References and sources of additional information

The Digestive Diseases Foundation
This organisation is a registered charity that offers advice and information on digestive problems. They can be contacted at:
3, St Andrew’s Place, London, NW1 4LB
www.digestivedisorders.org.uk

Bladder and Bowel Community
They help support millions of people who are living with conditions that affect their bladder or bowel.
7 The Court, Holywell Business Park, Northfield Road, Southam, CV47 0FS
www.bladderandbowel.org
Phone: 01926 357220
Email: help@bladderandbowel.org
How to contact us:

GI Physiology Department,
Gate 36, Level 1,
Brunel Building,
Southmead Hospital,
Bristol, BS10 5NB
0117 414 8801

www.nbt.nhs.uk
email: GIphysiology@nbt.nhs.uk

If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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