



Gastroenterology Specialists

of Southwest Florida

Diplomate, American Board of Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology

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Lactose Intolerance and Small Bowel Bacterial Overgrowth Hydrogen Tests

Patient's Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

How do I prepare for the test? The hydrogen breath test cannot be done following a colonoscopy, barium enema, or any tests that require a bowel prep to be given. The bowel prep will cleanse the bacteria. You must wait 4 weeks to have a breath test done to allow the bacteria to re-establish.

4 weeks before the test: DO NOT take any antibiotics or Pepto Bismol. Do NOT undergo colonoscopy, barium enema, or other tests that require bowel prep or cleansing.

24 hours before the test: DO NOT smoke the day before and the day of the test. Smoking can affect the results of the test. Try to avoid places where people smoke. Second-hand smoke can also affect the results of the test.

8 hours before the test: DO NOT eat or drink anything (including water) for 8 hours before the test.

Day of the test: DO NOT smoke. Avoid second-hand smoke. DO NOT chew gum. DO NOT use mouthwash. Use only a small amount of water when you brush your teeth.

Upon arrival for the test: A healthcare provider will explain the test in detail and answer any questions you may have.

The testing procedure lasts about 3 hours.

After the test

- Preliminary results of the test will be discussed with you.
- Final test results will be sent to your physician.
- You may resume your normal activities.
- You may resume your normal diet unless you have other tests that require dietary restrictions.

Facts about Lactose Intolerance and Small Bowel Bacterial Overgrowth Hydrogen Breath Tests



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• What is the hydrogen breath test?

- The hydrogen breath test is used to identify one of two conditions: lactose intolerance or an abnormal growth of bacteria in the intestine.

• What is lactose intolerance?

- Lactose intolerance is the inability to digest lactose, the sugar found in milk. Lactose intolerance occurs because of the body's lack of lactase, an enzyme normally produced by the small intestine. Lactase is needed to digest lactose. Symptoms of intolerance include cramping, bloating, gas, or diarrhea when dairy products are consumed.

• What is bacterial overgrowth in the intestine?

- Normally, small amounts of bacteria are found in the intestine. If there is a significant increase in the amount of bacteria, food and nutrients are not absorbed properly. Bacterial overgrowth can result from a slow transit of food through the bowels or from certain medications. Symptoms may include abdominal pain, bloating, gas, and diarrhea.

• What happens during the hydrogen breath test?

- A breath sample will be collected and tested for the presence of hydrogen. To obtain the sample, you will be asked to blow up a balloon-type bag. Normally, very little hydrogen is detected in the breath. You will then be given a pleasant tasting solution to drink. Breath samples are collected every 20 – 30 minutes for 3 hours to detect any increase in hydrogen in the breath as the solution is digested. Increased hydrogen breath levels indicate improper digestion.