



PATIENT INFORMATION

Phlebotomy

A guide to having a blood test

There are a number of reasons why your Doctor may request that you have a blood sample taken. These are usually to aid in diagnosis, to monitor treatment, or to exclude certain conditions. In most cases these samples will be taken by a procedure known as Phlebotomy or Venepuncture, i.e. taking blood from a vein. The information given below will explain the procedure in more detail.

How is a blood sample taken?

The procedure is performed by a trained member of staff, usually a phlebotomist, doctor or nurse. A tourniquet is placed around your arm just above the elbow, the area is cleaned and then a small needle is inserted into a vein on the inner arm. Blood is withdrawn into sample bottles and the needle is then removed. Pressure is applied at the site with a piece of cotton wool or gauze until the bleeding has stopped and then a small plaster is applied. Please tell the person taking the blood if you are allergic to sticking plaster.

Will it hurt?

The initial insertion of the needle involves a pin prick sensation but after that the rest of the procedure should be quite painless. Some people experience continued discomfort or pain. The cause is unknown but is thought to be associated with nerves under the surface of the skin. This usually settles quite quickly, but if it persists you should consult your GP or a member of hospital staff.

Will it bruise?

A small bruise or lump (haematoma) may develop after the venepuncture, but this is usually self-limiting and does not require treatment. Some conditions may increase the risk of bruising. These include:

- ❖ Medications such as warfarin and aspirin. Also the newer anticoagulants such as: Apixaban, Rivaroxaban, Dabigatran and Edoxaban.
- ❖ Conditions such as a bleeding disorder or low platelets (thrombocytopenia)
- ❖ Where it is difficult to locate the vein, for example if the arm is swollen (oedema)
- ❖ Elderly patients

In order to reduce this risk as much as possible, please tell the person taking the blood if you have any such conditions or if you have previously experienced problems following venepuncture.

Applying firm pressure to the site until the bleeding has stopped should help to minimize any bruising. If possible keep the arm slightly raised and avoid excessive movement of the arm, such as lifting or carrying heavy parcels, for an hour or so after the blood test. Should you experience excessive bruising or prolonged bleeding, then apply further firm pressure to the area. A few ice cubes wrapped in a towel may help reduce any swelling and bruising.

Bruising can look very dramatic and some people may find this worrying especially if it appears away from the site where the blood has been taken or is visible for a few days following the procedure. However, it is usually harmless and will disperse with time.

What happens to the blood samples?

The samples are processed in the pathology laboratory and the results sent to the person who asked for the sample to be taken. Some samples may need to be sent away for further tests or stored in case we need to refer to them in the future.

These samples may also be used for clinical audit, quality assessment and education or training.

If you have any questions about this procedure please ask the member of staff taking the sample or the person responsible for your care.