

# Having somatosensory evoked potentials (SSEPs)

**This leaflet explains more about the somatosensory evoked potentials (SSEPs) procedure. If you have any further questions after reading this leaflet, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.**

## **What are SSEPs?**

SSEPs stands for somatosensory evoked potentials. These are signals sent from your nerves and brain in response to physical stimulation, along what is called the somatosensory nerve pathway. We are able to record these signals to help us see how well your nerves and nervous system are working. Sensory nerves that cause sensations in the arms and/or legs are tested. A doctor may recommend you go for an SSEP test if you have been experiencing feelings of numbness or weakness in your arms or legs that may be caused by problems affecting the somatosensory nerve pathway.

## **What do I need to do to prepare?**

**Please tell us if you have a cardiac pacemaker (especially if it is the type that can deliver shocks to restart your heart) or any other implanted device.**

If you have a pacemaker let us know by calling 020 7188 3954 or writing to the department of clinical neurophysiology (the full address will be on your appointment letter). When you come for your appointment, please bring any information you have about your pacemaker or other device you have. This is so we can take your pacemaker into account when monitoring your heartbeat as part of the procedure.

You should eat, drink and take your medicines as normal.

To avoid having to take your clothes off at the appointment, it is helpful to wear loose-fitting clothes, preferably trousers and a top (no dresses or jumpsuits). This makes it easier for us to access your wrists, collarbone, the bottom of your neck, ankles, the back of your knees and your lower back. If your legs need to be examined you will be asked to take off your shoes and socks/stockings/tights.

Some skin moisturisers and body lotions can interfere with the test so please do not use them on the day of your test.

Please make sure your hair is clean, dry, and free from any hair care products.

## **What happens during the procedure?**

We will place some electrodes along your arm, legs, back, neck and head to record the nerves' responses. To do this we will make precise marks on your skin (these marks easily come off).

We will then rub each mark with a mild abrasive gel and stick small discs (electrodes) to the marks using a paste that washes out very easily.

You will be asked to relax on a reclined chair and will feel a tapping sensation while the nerve is being tested. This can be a little uncomfortable at first, but most people get used to it and find it painless.

Depending on the complexity of the test it will take between 60 and 90 minutes.

## **Will I feel any pain?**

The procedure may be slightly uncomfortable but is usually painless.

## **What are the risks?**

There are no risks associated with this procedure.

## **Are there any side effects?**

Side effects from the SSEPs procedure are very rare and are limited to some minor skin irritation from the electrodes.

## **What happens after the test?**

The electrodes will be removed and your skin is washed. You will then be able to return home or to work immediately after the test. There are no restrictions to driving, so you can drive as normal after the test.

## **When will I get the results?**

The results will be analysed and a full report will be sent the doctor who referred you. This usually takes a week and a half.

On rare occasions it may be necessary to cancel your test due to unexpected equipment failure, if this is the case, we will let you know by phone or post and arrange a new appointment.

## **Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns about the procedure, please call our department of neurophysiology on 020 7188 3954 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas'

**t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's

**e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

## **Language Support Services**

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815      **fax:** 020 7188 5953

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