

Having a SeHCAT study

This leaflet explains more about a SeHCAT study, including the benefits and risks. It also provides information on what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a SeHCAT study?

A SeHCAT study investigates how well the body absorbs bile salts. Bile salt is a chemical produced in the liver and stored in the gallbladder. It helps to digest fats and eliminate toxins from the body. If bile salts are not being absorbed properly, they interfere with how the bowel absorbs water and can cause diarrhoea.

What happens during a SeHCAT study?

You will need to attend the department for two appointments a week apart. You are welcome to bring a friend or relative with you. Due to the tests we perform in nuclear medicine, the area is not suitable for children. When you are called for your study your friend or relative will be asked to wait in our waiting area for you until your study is complete.

When you arrive for your appointment, you will be given a capsule to swallow which contains a synthetic bile salt with a small amount of radioactive tracer. A radioactive tracer is a type of radiation known as ionising radiation (similar to x-ray). After you have taken the capsule you are free to leave the department until it is time for us to measure the amount of radioactivity within your body. If you prefer, you can sit in our waiting room.

You will have the first set of measurements taken about three hours after you have swallowed the capsule. We will use a scanner called a gamma camera. You will be asked to lie down and stay as still as possible on a scanning couch. There is no need to undress, but we will ask you to remove any metal objects from your clothing or pockets such as coins, belts, watches, and jewellery. Metallic objects can block the camera detecting radioactivity from the patient.

The gamma camera will not come close to you and will not touch you. A member of staff will be with you at all times.

A set of pictures are taken which allow the computer programme to analyse the images and measure the radioactivity. The delay between taking the capsule and the measurements is required to allow the radioactive tracer to be taken up by the body.

After this, the nuclear medicine technologist will ask you to wait for a few minutes while they check the images from your scan are saved on the computer correctly. They will let you know when you can leave the department and go home.

One week later, you will return to the department for the second part of the SeHCAT study. This will happen in exactly the same way as the first.

The staff are not able to give you the result of the SeHCAT study on the day but they will write to your referring doctor with the results within two to three working days of the study being completed.

How can I prepare for a SeHCAT study?

You can eat and drink normally on the day of the study.

It is very important that you have told us about any medication that you are currently taking. This is because some medications will need to be stopped before the study as they interfere with the test results. We may not be able to carry out the study if you have not told us about your medication. Please contact the Nuclear Medicine department urgently (contact details at the end of this leaflet) if you are taking the following medication **or any others** for diarrhoea:

- Creon
- Cholestyramine
- Colesevelam

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding

Radiation can be harmful for an unborn baby. If you are, or think you may be, pregnant you must tell us as soon as possible, ideally before confirming your appointment. For all nuclear medicine studies we will check your pregnancy status with you before using any radioactive tracer.

Radioactive tracers can be passed into breast milk. Please tell us before you come for your test if you are breastfeeding and we can advise you whether you will need to stop for any amount of time.

What are the risks?

You receive a small radiation dose (0.3milliSieverts) from the radioactivity in the capsule when having a SeHCAT study. The radiation dose is equivalent to the amount received from natural sources of radiation in about two months. The risks from the radiation are minimal and there are no obvious side effects from taking this capsule, so the benefits of having the test outweigh the risk. This radioactivity leaves your body naturally in your urine.

You should not feel sick or drowsy after swallowing the capsule or in the week afterwards and it will not affect your ability to drive a car. The radiation dose to other people around you is very low and you do not need to keep away from anyone if you are having this test.

Please see above for risks if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves.

If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you.

What happens after the SeHCAT study?

As soon as the study is completed you can leave the hospital once instructed by a member of staff. After the study you can eat and drink as normal.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

After the study, the nuclear medicine consultant will study the measurements and write a report. They will write to the doctor who referred you for the study. You should already have an appointment booked with the team who referred you. If not, please contact them to arrange a follow-up appointment to discuss the results of the study and any treatment you may need.

Contact us

We want your visit to the department to be as pleasant as possible. If you have any questions or concerns please call the Nuclear Medicine department (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday):

Guy's Hospital Nuclear Medicine: 020 7188 4112
St. Thomas' Hospital Nuclear Medicine: 020 7188 4084

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) e: complaints2@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:

t: 020 7188 8815 e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Leaflet number: 4232/VER1

Date published: April 2016

Review date: April 2019

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