

Antinuclear Antibody



Does this test have other names?

ANA, fluorescent antinuclear antibody test, FANA

What is this test?

This blood test is done to help your healthcare provider find out if you have an autoimmune disease. This kind of disease happens when your immune system attacks your normal cells.

Your immune system is your body's defense system. It protects you against foreign invaders like viruses and bacteria. In some cases, your immune system can become confused. It can think that normal cells in your body are foreign invaders. When that happens, your body can make proteins called antibodies that attack your own cells.

When antibodies attack cells in your body, such as in your joints, they can cause swelling and redness known as inflammation. Antinuclear antibodies attack normal proteins in the center structure (nucleus) of your body's cells. Antinuclear antibodies are found in many autoimmune diseases. These include lupus, scleroderma, and rheumatoid arthritis.

Why do I need this test?

Your healthcare provider may order this test if you have symptoms of an autoimmune disease. Common symptoms of autoimmune diseases that may stem from antinuclear antibodies include:

- Fever
- Joint pain
- Weight loss
- Skin rash
- Tiredness

What other tests might I have along with this test?

Finding antinuclear antibodies in your blood tells your healthcare provider only that you may have an autoimmune disease. It doesn't tell which disease you have. Your provider may order other tests depending on your symptoms and your physical exam.

What do my test results mean?

Test results may vary depending on your age, gender, health history, and other things. Your test results may be different depending on the lab used. They may not mean you have a problem. Ask your healthcare provider what your test results mean for you.

A positive test for ANA does not mean you have an autoimmune disease. The test finds small amounts of these antibodies in up to 15% of healthy people. Antinuclear antibodies are measured in titers. A titer above 1:160 is usually seen as a positive test result. A positive result may mean:

- You have systemic lupus erythematosus, or SLE. About 95% of people with this autoimmune disease test positive for antinuclear antibodies.
- You have another type of autoimmune disease.

- You have a short-term condition, like an infection, that's causing your antinuclear antibodies to go up.
- You are one of the 15% of normal people who have positive antinuclear antibodies without any disease.

How is this test done?

The test requires a blood sample, which is drawn through a needle from a vein in your arm.

Does this test pose any risks?

Taking a blood sample with a needle carries small risks that include bleeding, infection, bruising, and a sense of lightheadedness. When the needle pricks your arm, you may have a slight stinging feeling or pain. Afterward, the site may be a little sore.

What might affect my test results?

Many conditions can trigger a positive antinuclear antibody test even without an autoimmune disease. Conditions that may cause a "false positive" test include:

- Being older than 65
- Having cancer
- Taking certain medicines
- Having a viral infection
- Having a long-term infection

How do I get ready for this test?

You don't need any special preparation for this test. Tell your healthcare provider whether you have had any recent or long-term infections. Also, let your provider know about any medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines, herbs, and supplements.

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