

Sweat Chloride Testing for Cystic Fibrosis (CF)

A sweat test is a test to see if a person has Cystic Fibrosis (CF). Cystic Fibrosis is a disease that causes thick mucus in the lungs, pancreas and other organs. This can lead to problems in the respiratory and digestive tract. The sweat test should be performed in a Cystic Fibrosis Foundation accredited care center, by a trained technician.

What happens during a sweat test?

There are no needles involved in the test. In the first part of the test, a colorless, odorless liquid, known to cause sweating, is applied to a small area on the arm or leg. An electrode is then attached to that small area. This allows the technician to apply a weak electrical current to the area to cause sweating. A person might feel a tingling sensation in the area. This part of the test lasts about 5 minutes. For the second part of the test, the area is cleaned and a device used to collect the sweat is placed on the skin and wrapped. Thirty minutes later, the collected sweat is sent to the laboratory. The test takes about one hour.

What does the test reveal?

This test is being done to rule out CF. People with CF have more salt in their sweat than a person who does not have CF.

In general,

- A normal test (does not have CF): Less than 30mEq/L of salt
- A borderline test (does not rule out or confirm a CF diagnosis): 31-59 mEq/L of salt
- Levels consistent with a CF diagnosis: 60 mEq/L or higher

How do I find out the results?

Results are available 24-48 hours after the test. The care provider who ordered the test will call you with the results.