

Caloric test

Balance clinic

This leaflet is for patients with symptoms of dizziness who are about to undergo Caloric testing. It is one of the tests we can use to evaluate the function of the ears and their contribution to your balance.

The tests we choose to evaluate your dizziness will depend on your individual symptoms. This leaflet covers what you can expect during the test.

Caloric test

What is the purpose of the test?

The Caloric test measures the function of a semi-circular canal. These are responsible for horizontal (side to side) head movements. It may not tell us the exact cause of your dizziness but the test can help decipher if there is a difference in function between the left and right balance organs.

What to expect during the test

Please ask prior to the test, if you are not sure/ clear what the test entails and why we are carrying it out. The test will take place using video goggles that we used in previous sessions. The front cover of the goggles will be closed and this testing will take place in a darkened room.

You will be required to lie down on a couch while we perform the test. Please let us know if you have neck or back concerns.

The test involves puffing some warm air into your ears, first in the right then in the left, with a short interval of a few minutes between each measurement. In some cases, we may need to conduct a second set of irrigations using cool air for the result to be clear.

In total we usually undertake 2 or 4 irrigations.

What you may experience

It is common for people to experience a turning sensation (vertigo). In some people this can result in nausea and, in a small number of cases, vomiting. These symptoms will usually pass after a brief period. It is uncommon but some patients can feel anxious with the testing. You may experience a little discomfort to the ears as we are warming the ear up and the puffs/irrigation may also be noisy.

It is unlikely that the testing will cause any worsening of your underlying symptoms, but the test may interact with migraine. The test can cause some imbalance (unsteadiness), following completion. This is usually brief but in rare cases, can last a little longer.

Potential risks from performing the Caloric test?

The Caloric test is a safe test when performed with the correct checks. As a precaution, we do not perform the test on patients with underlying, unstable heart conditions, high and/or poorly- controlled blood pressure, recent stroke, epilepsy, acute mental health disorder, recent ear surgery (within 6 months) or eye surgery (within 3 months). You should discuss this with your clinician before coming to your appointment or before undergoing the test, if you have any concerns in this regard.

We perform checks beforehand to rule out any ear contra-indications like infections, perforations or thinner weaker ear drums.

As the version of the test using air is loud, it may make any tinnitus worse in a small number of cases. If you have tinnitus or hypersensitivity to sound, it may not be appropriate to carry out this version of the test in all cases. If you have any concerns, you should discuss this with your clinician in advance.

Can I decide not to have the Caloric test carried out?

Of course, we can only conduct these tests with your consent. The clinician will check you are happy to continue before beginning the test. You are free to decline any of the tests and treatments during the appointment. If you are concerned about the tests, contact your clinician prior to your appointment so this can be discussed.

What will happen after the assessment?

Your clinician may be able to give you the results on the day but in some cases, they may require further analysis or review with other healthcare professionals to understand their significance. If this is the case, we will contact you after the discussion, via phone or email.

Appointment

Appointment duration

Your appointment time allocated is 1 hour.

Preparation for the appointment

- We advise you do not drive on the day of testing and arrange for someone to bring you to and collect you from the appointment. If you do drive, make sure there is someone to collect you in the event you do not feel fit to drive afterwards
- Please stop taking any anti-dizziness medication 48 hours before your appointment. Your balance medication may affect the results of your tests. This includes Stemetil, Prochlorperazine, Buccastem, Serc, Cinnarizine and Stugeron. Continue to take other medication as normal. Please check with your GP if further advice is needed regarding the interruption of your balance medication. If you have taken any of the above within 48 hours or you do not feel able to stop them, please tell your clinician so that they can take this into account when understanding your results
- Please do not consume any alcohol or recreational drugs 48 hours before your appointment
- Please do not wear any make-up, mainly eye-makeup, to your appointment as it can interfere with the tests
- You should avoid large meals before the test due to the fact that the test can make you feel nauseas
- You may wish to bring a bottle of water with you

Questions about the appointment

If you have any questions about your appointment, or any of the information provided in this leaflet, please contact your clinician before your appointment.

Contact us

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