

Respiratory physiology walking tests

Patient information sheet

Introduction

Walking tests are performed within the respiratory physiology department along a flat corridor. Your doctor has requested this test to give them information about your exercise capacity and oxygen and heart rate response to exercise.

Two types of walking tests are available, of which you will only perform **one**:

- The six-minute walk test
- The incremental shuttle walk test

What do I need to do to prepare for the test?

We recommend that you arrive at least ten minutes before your appointment time to ensure that you are well rested. If you are prescribed oxygen for use during walking outside the home, please use this for the final ten minutes of this rest time.

Please also note the following points:

- Wear suitable clothing and footwear for walking
- Continue with any inhalers or medication as usual
- Avoid smoking on the day of testing
- Avoid vigorous exercise for two hours before the test

- Do not consume alcohol for at least four hours before the test
- Bring any walking aids with you if you use them
- As described above, please bring your oxygen and the accessories if you should use oxygen while walking
- Bring your inhalers and GTN if you use them

How long will the appointment take?

The test will take up to 30 minutes to complete. This includes pretest checks, setting up the test, the walk and the time it takes for you to recover.

The six-minute walk test

What is the six-minute walk test?

The six-minute walk test measures the distance you can walk around two cones over six minutes along a 30 metre flat corridor.

What happens during the test?

First the physiologist will go through some pre-test checks. You should be rested and using your oxygen, if prescribed, as described above.

A recording of the instructions will be played to you explaining the test. Following this, the physiologist will answer any questions you may have.

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A sensor will be placed on your forehead or finger - this is to measure your oxygen levels and heart rate during the test.

During the test, you will need to walk as far as you can in the six minutes. You can stop and rest during this time for as long and as often as you need to. Your heart rate and oxygen levels will be monitored throughout the test.

When the test is finished, you will be monitored for a few more minutes to allow your oxygen levels and heart rate to recover. You will then be asked a few questions about your symptoms or any limitations during the walk.

The incremental shuttle walk test

What is the incremental shuttle walk test?

The test is designed to assess your maximum walking capacity by monitoring how far you can walk, with the pace increasing gradually every minute at the sound of a beep.

What happens during the test?

First the physiologist will go through some pre-test checks.

A recording of the instructions will be played to you explaining the test and the physiologist will answer any questions you may have following this.

A sensor will be placed on your forehead or finger to measure your oxygen levels and heart rate during the test.

During the test, you will be walking around two cones spaced nine metres apart. The walking pace will be set by a beep. The aim is for you to

turn around at the cone at the first beep and the second cone by the next beep. As the test goes on the beeps will gradually get closer together which means you will have to walk faster.

The test continues until you cannot keep up with the set pace of the beeps or you become too short of breath.

When the test is finished you will be monitored for a few minutes to allow your oxygen levels and heart rate to recover. You will then be asked a few questions about your symptoms.

When will I be told the results of the test?

Your results will be sent to the doctor who requested the test. That doctor will be able to tell you the result of the test and what it means for you.

Any questions?

If you have any questions about the test or the department, please do not hesitate to telephone the respiratory physiology department on **01223 638207**.

Reference

American Thoracic Society (ATS) statement: guidelines for the six minute walk test. *Am J Crit Care Med* 2002; 166: 111-117.

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