

Dexamethasone Suppression Test (DST)

Checking for Excess Cortisol

Your Test Plan

Bring this page with you to your pre-test appointment and blood draw.

Take your tablet on	Date: _____
Tablet dose	_____ mg dexamethasone (_____ tablet(s))
Time to take it	_____: _____ PM (between 11:00 PM and midnight)
Blood draw date	Date: _____
Blood draw time	_____: _____ AM (between 8:00 and 9:00 AM) — do not arrive later
Where to go	_____
Eating and drinking	Eat and drink normally, unless your team notes otherwise here: _____
Questions? Call	_____



Your Test: 2 Simple Steps

Step 1 – Night Before, 11:00 PM – Midnight

- Take 1 mg dexamethasone. This may be one 1 mg tablet or two 0.5 mg tablets.
- You can take the tablets with water or juice. Taking them with a light snack or a glass of milk is not necessary, but some people prefer it because it can help prevent indigestion or heartburn afterward.
- Do not drink alcohol the day before or the night of the test.
- Sleep as normally as you can. A very poor night's sleep, or a day of unusual physical or emotional stress, can affect your result.



If you miss the dose, reschedule the test on a different date. If you vomit within an hour of taking the tablet, you will need to reschedule the test on a different date.

Step 2 – Morning of Test, 8:00 – 9:00 AM

- Have your blood drawn between 8:00 and 9:00 AM.



IMPORTANT: Take dexamethasone between 11:00 PM and midnight, and have your blood drawn between 8:00 and 9:00 AM. Staying inside both windows is what makes the result accurate.

Book Your Blood Draw First

Book the blood draw before you take the tablet. The test only works if your blood is drawn the next morning during the correct time window. If you take the tablet but cannot get a morning appointment, the dose is wasted and the test must be rescheduled.



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Tell Your Healthcare Team – As Early As Possible

Tell your team about these medicines or situations when the test is being scheduled, not the night before. Some changes may need to happen weeks before the test. Do not stop taking any medicine on your own.

- You take estrogen of any kind – combined birth control pills, patches, rings, implants, or hormone replacement. These can interfere with how the result is read, and it may be necessary to stop them about six weeks before the test. Your endocrine specialist will tell you whether that applies to you, and you will need another form of contraception if you stop the pill.
- You take seizure medication such as phenytoin, phenobarbital, or carbamazepine
- You take rifampin (rifampicin), rifapentine, St. John's wort, diltiazem, cimetidine, itraconazole, ritonavir, or fluoxetine
- You are pregnant or think you may be – do not go ahead with the test until you have discussed it with your team
- You work night shifts
- You drink large amounts of alcohol
- You have a severe illness, or are under major stress



Steroid Medicines: Stop 24 Hours Before

Do not use any of the following for 24 hours before the test, until after your blood has been taken: steroid tablets such as prednisone or hydrocortisone, steroid creams and ointments, steroid nasal sprays, and steroid inhalers.

Why this matters: Steroid medicines can interfere with your result because they act like cortisol or may be detected by the blood test. This can happen with creams, sprays, inhalers, and tablets – not just medicines you swallow.

If stopping for 24 hours is not possible, or you are not sure whether one of your medicines counts, contact your healthcare team before the test rather than stopping on your own.

Keep taking all your other regular medicines as usual, unless your team has told you otherwise.

Common Mistakes That Can Invalidate Your Test

- Taking dexamethasone outside the window, or forgetting it entirely
- Taking the wrong dose (the dose should be 1 mg total)
- Having blood drawn after 9 AM
- Using any steroid – tablet, cream, nasal spray or inhaler – within 24 hours of the test
- Heavy exercise or major stress the day before



What to Expect

During the test

The test begins when you take the tablet and ends with the blood draw the next morning.

Side effects

Usually there are none. Rarely, dexamethasone can cause heartburn; taking it with milk may help. In theory, dexamethasone can raise blood sugar in people with diabetes, but in practice a single 1 mg dose is unlikely to have much effect. Check your blood sugar as you normally would.

After the test

Go back to your normal routine. If you were asked to stop any medicine for the test, your care team will tell you when to start it again.

Understanding Your Result

Your results are usually available within a week. Depending on what it shows, your healthcare team may contact you to arrange further tests or offer you a clinic visit to review the results.

NORMAL RESPONSE	ABNORMAL RESPONSE
 Cortisol is low. Your body responded as expected, and cortisol was appropriately suppressed.	 Cortisol remains elevated. Further evaluation may be needed, but this does not automatically mean Cushing Syndrome. Your care team will discuss the results with you.

*This resource is for educational purposes and does not replace personalized medical advice.
Always confirm test-specific instructions and test results with your clinician.*