

Patient information

Phlebotomy – a guide to having blood samples taken

There are many situations in which your doctor may request that you have a blood sample or samples taken, usually to aid in diagnosis, to monitor treatment or to exclude certain conditions. In most cases these samples will be taken by a procedure known as phlebotomy or venepuncture, ie taking blood from a vein. The information given below attempts to answer some of the most commonly asked questions concerning blood tests.

What exactly is happening when my blood is being taken?

When your blood is being taken the phlebotomist puts a tourniquet around your arm just above the elbow, cleans the area and gently inserts a small needle into a vein on the inner arm. The phlebotomist quickly withdraws just enough blood needed for all the tests and then gently removes the needle. Pressure will be applied to a piece of cotton wool / gauze over the site to stop the bleeding and a small plaster applied – please let the phlebotomist know if you are allergic to sticking plaster. The blood is then placed into one or more tubes and is sent to the laboratory for testing.

Is it a new needle?

The phlebotomist will always use a new sterile needle and remove the cover before taking your blood sample. Once your sample has been taken you will see the phlebotomist dispose of the needle into a container for sharp objects.

Will it hurt?

The initial insertion of the needle involves a pinprick sensation, but after that the rest of the procedure should be quite painless.

Will it bruise?

Some patients are more likely to bruise than others, eg if you are taking Warfarin which affects how quickly your blood clots. To help minimise bruising it is important to press on the area the blood was taken from until bleeding stops. If possible keep the arm slightly elevated and try not to carry any heavy bags for a short while after the blood test.

Why are different bottles needed?

Some of the tests requested by your doctor may require that your blood is preserved in different ways for the best quality results. Most tests will be performed in either haematology or biochemistry (you may see the names of the tests on the request form).

How long will my test results take?

The results of most tests will be through in a couple of days. These results are available to your doctor. Electronic or computerised reports will usually be available sooner than printed paper reports as these are sent by post.

What are these tests for?

Some commonly requested tests are listed on the request form. Some of these are general screening tests and others test for specific conditions.