

Lactose Breath Test



This family education sheet explains what to expect during your child's lactose breath test.

What is a lactose breath test?

- A lactose breath test is done to find out if your child has a hard time digesting lactose. This is called lactose intolerance.
- Lactose is the sugar found in milk products.
- Samples of your child's breath are collected before and after they have a drink with lactose (orange-flavored sugar water). The samples are sent to a laboratory (lab) to be analyzed.
- The test takes about 3½ hours.

How should I prepare my child?

- Your child must have an empty stomach for the test. **Don't give your child anything to eat or drink 12 hours before the time of the test.** This includes water, gum and candy. They can't use mouthwash. Only use a small amount of water when brushing teeth the night before the test.
- **It's very important to follow these instructions:**
 - **4 weeks before the test:** Don't give them antibiotics, bismuth products, antimicrobial herbals (oregano oil) or probiotics. Talk with your child's doctor if your child is taking antibiotics.
 - **7 days before the test:** Don't give them laxatives. Your child should not have had a bowel cleanout or barium enema for 14 days before the test.
 - **2 days before the test:** Don't give anti-diarrhea medication (like loperamide).
 - **The day before and day of the test:** Don't let them smoke or get exposed to secondhand smoke.
 - **1 hour before or any time during the test:** They shouldn't do vigorous exercise.
 - **Day of the test:** They shouldn't use toothpaste.
- We strongly recommend that your child not have many dairy products, starches or sugars (a low-residue diet) the **day before the test.**
- Explain the test to your child in simple terms. Explain why they need the test. Let them know that you'll be with them during the whole test.
- Tell your child that they'll drink 1 cup of sweet sugar water. Tell them that it's important to finish it even if they don't like the taste.

Where is the test done?

This test will be done at Boston Children's Hospital Needham location in the Gastroenterology suite: 360 1st Ave., 2nd Floor, Needham. If your child is already in the hospital, the test may be done on their floor.

What happens before the test?

Please arrive 15 minutes before the scheduled time of the test. It's important that you arrive on time. We make every effort to start tests on time, but sometimes there are delays.

If you're late, the test may be canceled.

For children having the lactose breath test at 360 1st Ave in Needham:

- Go directly to the second floor of the Boston Children's Needham Building.
- When you arrive, a technician will greet you and explain the test. They can answer your questions.

For children having the lactose breath test at a Boston Children's satellite location (Lexington, Peabody or Needham):

- Go to the clinic's registration desk.
- A technician will come to explain the test and bring you and your child to the lab.

What happens during the test?

- The technician will have your child blow into a small plastic bag to collect a breath sample.
- After the first sample, the technician will give your child the lactose drink. If your child uses a special bottle or cup, you may bring it to the test.
- The technician will collect breath samples every 30 minutes for the next 3 hours.
- In between samples, you and your child may sit in the waiting room. There are books and TV in this area. You may want to bring your child's favorite books and toys to help pass the time.
- **It's important that your child doesn't eat or drink anything during this time.**

What happens after the test?

- Once all the breath samples are collected, your child may eat and drink. The technician will tell you when you may give your child food and when you may go home.
- If lactose is causing your child's symptoms, it's possible that they may have some discomfort during the test. This should go away by the end of the test.

How will I find out the results?

The lab will analyze the breath samples. A gastroenterology (GI) doctor will read the results. The results will be sent to your child's primary care doctor in about 1 week. You can call this doctor for the results.

Contact us

If you have questions or need to reschedule a test, call the location in which the test is taking place:

- Boston Children's Hospital's Main Campus (300 Longwood Avenue):** (617) 355-6173 and ask for the breath test technician
- Boston Children's at Lexington:** (781) 216-2999
- Boston Children's at Peabody:** (781) 216-3600
- Boston Children's at Needham:** (781) 216-0355

This Family Education Sheet is available in Arabic and Spanish.