

Diagnostic Testing

What are diagnostic tests?

- Diagnostic tests are used by doctors to enable them to better assess your health situation
- These tests can be used to help establish your initial diagnosis, assess the effectiveness of the treatment you are receiving and/or detect potential complications
- Some tests are simple, so simple that often you are often unaware that they are happening, like a dipstick analysis of a urine sample
- Other diagnostic tests are obvious enough for you to be aware of – like taking your blood pressure, temperature and pulse
- There is another group of diagnostic tests that are considered to be low risk and non invasive, such as an xray or ultrasound
- As soon as the requirements of a specific test involve entry of a needle or a probe into your body they are considered to be 'invasive'. These tests include blood tests, x-rays that require an injection of a dye, or nuclear scans that require an injection of a radio isotope.

Why are diagnostic tests important?

- Diagnostic tests are often an important part of establishing what your health problem is so that a plan of action can be devised that will best suit your health care needs.
- The doctor can use other assessment skills to assist in this problem solving process. These skills involve drawing conclusions from a person's medical history and performing a physical examination. However, often a diagnostic test is required to establish a diagnosis, to plan an intervention or to monitor progress.

What are the risks?

- The risk depends on the type of procedure being performed
- Before ordering any diagnostic test the doctor will assess that the potential benefit for the patient outweighs the risk to the patient

What about consent to testing?

In its simplest form consent can mean just cooperating and holding out an arm so that your blood pressure can be taken. This is called informal, inferred or implied consent.

There are 2 levels of tests, non-invasive (eg urine analysis, blood pressure) and invasive (eg x-rays, blood tests), where implied consent is usual.

There is a third level of testing, also invasive testing, which carries specific risks, written consent needs to be obtained from the patient, by the person who has ordered the test, before the tests are carried out. These tests are usually biopsies and angiograms.

Informed Consent

The following rules are useful when obtaining informed consent.

The person giving consent:

- Must be considered to be of sound mind and be of the legal age of consent.
- Must be informed of the risks associated with the procedure to be performed.
- Must give permission for the procedure to be performed by signing an authorised consent form.

How do I make an informed decision?

- The only way to make an informed decision is to become informed. Sometimes this is difficult because you may be required to gather information in a field in which you are not an expert at a time when you are not functioning at your best.
- It helps to have a good working relationship with the doctor who manages your care, so that you feel comfortable seeking the

appropriate information, asking questions and being involved in making some of the decisions that surround your care.

- Sometimes it is also necessary to seek information from other sources and obtain medical opinions from other health professionals, so that you can have peace of mind that the best decision are being made.
- Discuss the procedure with a doctor you know, such as your general practitioner. For difficult decisions, you can also request a second opinion from a specialist. Your GP can help you organise this.
- Don't be concerned that your doctor will be offended or upset if you ask for a second opinion. Doctors are used to this process and consider it a normal aspect of patient care.
- If English is not your first language and you are unsure about the explanation you have been given, ask for an interpreter to be present or discuss the procedure with a doctor who speaks your first language.