



# A guide to...

## Having a Capsule Sponge Test

### *Patient Information*

#### How to contact us

Booking and interpreting queries – please call the number on your appointment letter

Clinical queries – Hemel Hempstead Hospital: 01442 287968

Watford General Hospital: 01923 436095

Any other queries – please call Hemel Hempstead Hospital: 01442 287681

**If you need this leaflet in another language, large print,  
Braille or audio version, please call 01923 217 198  
or email [westherts.pals@nhs.net](mailto:westherts.pals@nhs.net)**



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Ratified / Review Date	Sept 2023 / Sept 2026
ID Number	27/2160/V1



## What is a Capsule Sponge Test?

A capsule sponge test is a small capsule on a string that the patient swallows. The capsule is the size of a vitamin pill. Once in the stomach, the capsule dissolves releasing a small spongy ball. A medic then pulls the string to bring the sponge back up the throat. This is quick and may feel a bit scratchy. The sponge is designed to collect a sample of cells from your oesophagus (gullet). This will then be tested to find out if there are any cells which are unexpected or abnormal.

Problems with heartburn and acid reflux are very common but occasionally this can lead to changes in the normal cells that line your oesophagus (gullet).

Very rarely these cells can develop into pre-cancerous or cancerous cells and may lead to oesophageal cancer (cancer of the gullet). When changes to cells are found early it can make any treatment much simpler and the impact on a patient is much less significant.

## The Advantage of Capsule Sponge Test?

- A capsule sponge test is a simple, safe and effective way of diagnosing conditions related to the oesophagus and can help your doctor investigate and manage your symptoms much quicker.
- The capsule sponge test is quick and more relaxed procedure than a gastroscopy. The capsule takes about seven mins to dissolve in the stomach.
- No sedation is used so you can drive home and continue your day as normal.

## Who Should Not Have a Capsule Sponge Test?

### A capsule sponge test is not recommended for patients:

- With symptoms of dysphagia or history of swallowing disorders
- With known or suspected anatomical abnormalities of the oesophagus or stomach
- That have undergone oesophageal or gastric dilation, ablation, biopsy, mucosal resection or other invasive medical procedures within the previous two months
- Are pregnant
- With known or suspected portal hypertension and/or gastric or oesophageal varices
- Taking anti-thrombotic drugs (e.g. anticoagulants, antiplatelet agents) that cannot be temporarily discontinued.

**If you are taking blood thinning medications such as warfarin, please call the department on the number on your appointment letter to notify us.**

## Preparation

Clopidogrel, aspirin, prasugrel, ticagrelor and other anti-platelet medications do not need to be stopped before your capsule sponge test.

You should stop any other anticoagulants the day of your capsule sponge test, eg: Rivaroxaban, Apixaban, Edoxaban, Dabigatran. Restart your medication the day after your capsule sponge test. Continue with your usual dose.

If you are taking Warfarin you will need to have an INR test the week before your capsule sponge test. Your INR has to be 3.5 or less. If your INR is within your target range, then continue with your usual dose.

## **What if your target range is more than 3.5?**

If your INR is not within your target range, please contact your anticoagulant clinic for advice as your dose may need to be adjusted.

If your INR result is above 3.5 contact your anticoagulant clinic or GP for advice.

This procedure must be done on an empty stomach. You cannot eat or drink for four hours before your appointment.

If you have diabetes, please make sure you have a light breakfast early in the morning a minimum of four hours before your appointment and take your usual medication.

If you have any questions about the test or find that you cannot keep your appointment, please contact the clinic using the contact details on your capsule sponge test referral letter.

## **What will happen?**

You should have nothing to eat or drink for four hours before your appointment.

Take your medication as normal, but with only a little water. Please bring a list of your medications with you to your appointment

If you have diabetes, please have a light breakfast early in the morning a minimum of four hours before your appointment and take your usual medication.

Remember to bring your consent form unsigned.

Please arrive on time for your appointment so that we can manage the number of patients in the clinic. Please do not arrive early for your appointment.

When you arrive, a medic will explain the procedure, ask you some routine questions about your health, medication and complete the consent form. You will have the opportunity to ask questions.

You will swallow the capsule sponge test capsule and string with some water. The end of the string is attached to a piece of card which the medic will hold.

Although the procedure only takes approximately 10 minutes, please allow one hour in the hospital for the whole process to be completed. You can go home straight after your test is completed.

If you have had a local anaesthetic spray, this causes a numbing in your throat which will soon go away.

For safety reasons you will be advised not to eat or drink for 20-30 minutes after the test. After this you can eat and drink as normal

If you have a sore throat after the test, suck a throat lozenge or sweet and take simple painkillers like paracetamol if required.

If your heartburn symptoms become worse, you should continue to take your heartburn medication as prescribed.

It is very unlikely you will experience any other symptoms, however if you experience any severe pain or bleeding you should contact the clinic using the contact details on your referral letter or leaflet. Outside normal opening times, please call 111 telling them that you have had a capsule sponge test.

### **When will I get the results of the procedure?**

The results of your test will be given to you either by telephone or by letter. We expect this to take around two to three weeks following your procedure.

If your capsule sponge test shows your cells are normal, this indicates that there is no evidence of damage to the oesophagus, and you will continue with treatment, such as acid suppressants for your symptoms.

If the capsule sponge test tests identifies any abnormal cells, this indicates that there is some damage to the oesophagus which will require further investigation with an endoscopy.

### **Are there any risks?**

The capsule sponge test has not been found to have any serious side effects. Most people do not have any problem swallowing the capsule but if you do have a problem, we will not continue with the test. You may have a mild sore throat which might last up to 48 hours after the test.

There is an extremely small risk (less than 1/1000) that the string may become detached from the sponge, or it may be difficult to remove the sponge. If this happens it is not painful or dangerous, but you will have an endoscopy to remove the sponge.

There is a very small chance that you may experience bleeding and this may be more likely if you are on blood thinning medication. If this happens, please call us using the contact details on your referral letter or leaflet. Outside normal opening times, please call 111 telling them know that you have had a capsule sponge test.

Like all tests, the capsule sponge test may not always find all abnormalities. On very rare occasions, a serious abnormality might not be identified. If you have any questions about this, please contact the clinic using the contact details on your capsule sponge test referral letter or leaflet.

### **Are there any alternatives?**

Capsule sponge test has been proven in clinical trials to be a simple, safe and effective way of diagnosing conditions related to the oesophagus (gullet). If indicated, an endoscopy is an alternative test. If you decide not to have a capsule sponge test, then you will have your surveillance endoscopy as previously scheduled.

### **Who can I contact if I have any questions?**

Please do not hesitate to telephone the department –

Hemel Hempstead General Hospital      Tel: 01442 287968 or

Watford General Hospital                      Tel: 01923 436095 (8.00am– 6.00pm Monday to Friday).

**After the investigation if you experience severe pain or bleeding, please attend your nearest Accident and Emergency department. Do not drive.**

- Accident and Emergency at Watford Tel: 01923 217 256
- Please note: there is NO Accident and Emergency at Hemel Hempstead or St Albans Hospitals.