



**Clydeside Action
on Asbestos**



**Investigations to
diagnose asbestos
related conditions**

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Common investigations used to diagnose your condition

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Introduction

If you have attended your GP recently with symptoms such as breathlessness or pain then there is the possibility that you may have to undergo some investigations.

These investigations play an important part in aiding health professionals to correctly diagnose any underlying asbestos related illness. Investigations can include an examination at home, your G.P's surgery or the hospital, by either a doctor or a nurse. You will be able to read about some of the more common investigations patients may be referred for in this booklet.

It may be that you only have to undergo some and not all of these investigations. The investigations described are used to diagnose many different conditions as well as for an asbestos related illness. The tests will help doctors ensure that an accurate diagnosis is reached and that any asbestos related condition is managed in the best possible way.

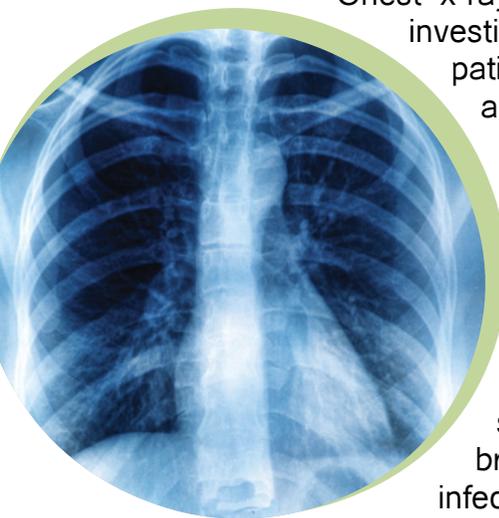
What are blood samples for?

Blood Samples are commonly taken to check how different parts of the body are functioning. For some patients who present with breathlessness a blood sample may be carried out to rule out some causes of breathlessness such as anaemia. Some asbestos conditions can cause oxygen levels to fall and therefore blood oxygen levels may be tested. Blood samples can also be taken to check for infection if patients have on-going health problems. Each of the blood samples taken will indicate if there are any problems that need to be addressed. Your doctor may decide to send you for more tests to find out exactly what is wrong. Please **do not be alarmed** if you are told that more investigations need to be done as the most important thing is to find out why you are feeling unwell.



What and how is a chest x-ray done?

Chest x-rays are one of the most common investigations carried out in hospitals on patients and are used to check for any abnormalities within the lungs.



An x-ray is made by passing very low doses of controlled radiation through the body which are then picked up on a photograph. This radiation passes through the skin, muscles and organs quickly, but moves slowly through the hard solid bones making them appear brighter on an x-ray picture. Lung infections, fluid and any abnormalities

such as asbestos illnesses will also show up as whitened areas within the lungs and chest. The x-ray helps to give doctors a lot of information that will assist in managing a condition correctly and help in ascertaining what type of asbestos condition a patient may have. If your doctor still is not happy with your symptoms then a more detailed investigation may be requested.

What is a CT scan?

A CT scan (Computerised Tomography) is now requested more frequently than it used to be as it provides better and more detailed pictures of the organs in the body.

The CT scanner is round and looks like a big “doughnut”. You will be asked to lie flat on a bed which moves very slowly through the centre of the machine. The test is easy and takes about 15-20 minutes and is most often done as an out-patient. A camera within the machine passes right around the bed taking x-ray pictures whilst the bed is being moved. The pictures are then sent to a computer which improves and gives more clarity and detail to the images taken. Lots of pictures are produced rather than just a single one and will clearly show if there are any abnormalities such as asbestos conditions that are affecting the lungs. The results will be reported and sent to the doctor looking after you.



What is a CT guided biopsy?

On occasions a doctor may require samples of fluid or tissue to be taken from the lung to help obtain an accurate diagnosis.

Using a CT scanner makes it easier to target the area being examined. This investigation can again be done as an out-patient under a local anaesthetic.



The procedure takes about 30-40 minutes. Any samples that are taken are sent to the labs for examination under the microscope. The results obtained can take a few days or week to be reported. Your consultant will then arrange for you to be informed about the results as soon as possible as they understand how important it is to keep you up-dated about things.

Why would I have to undergo an MRI Scan?

At times both an x-ray and CT scan are unable to provide enough information for doctors to confirm an accurate diagnosis and they may decide to send you for an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan.

This machine is very similar to a CT scanner; however it uses magnets to produce clear images of the organs of the body. It can make lots of banging noises so you will be offered headphones to wear and can listen to music to cut out some of the noise from the machine. The scan takes about 30 minutes and produces even clearer and more detailed images that indicate any asbestos related illnesses.

The test is also done as an out-patient and results are given at another time. **If you have a pacemaker or metal stent in place then please let the doctor know as an MRI scan can cause damage to these devices and may not be carried out.**



What is a Bronchoscopy and why is it done?

For patients who have any underlying symptoms, or who have anything which may require further investigation following an x-ray or CT scan, a bronchoscopy may be requested.

A bronchoscopy is an investigation that allows consultants to see directly into the lung airways using a camera whilst you are sedated. The examination is not painful and is carried out as an out-patient.

A mild sedative is given and a tiny camera is inserted through the nose into the lungs allowing the doctors to get a clear view of the main airways. Samples or biopsies can be taken which are sent to be analysed and help doctors to find out exactly what is wrong and why a patient is having any breathlessness or symptoms of concern.



When would I undergo a Thoracoscopy?

If you are still having underlying breathing difficulties which may be caused by problems affecting the outer lining of the lungs and chest cavity, then your doctor may suggest that you undergo a thoracoscopy.

This is a procedure that can be used if doctors are suspicious of an underlying asbestos related cancer such as Mesothelioma.

For many patients a thoracoscopy is carried out by a surgeon whilst patients are placed under a general anaesthetic; however some respiratory consultants are now carrying out this investigation without the need for a general anaesthetic.

A camera is inserted from the outside through a small cut in the side of the chest and not through the nose or mouth. The reason for this is to enable doctors to see between the linings of the lungs and chest wall that can't be seen by a bronchoscopy.

Biopsies and pictures can be obtained to help doctors reach an accurate diagnosis. This investigation often requires you to remain in hospital for assessment but you will recover quite quickly.

You may suffer from some pain after the procedure has been performed but you will be given painkillers both in hospital and to take at home to help manage this. Results will normally be given 1-2 weeks after the procedure has taken place.

What are Lung Function Tests?

Another common investigation often requested by doctors is Lung Function Tests. These are breathing tests that are carried out using a machine called a **Spirometer**.

These tests are often requested if you have any breathing difficulties or episodes of breathlessness and are regularly performed on patients with asbestos-related illness.

The spirometer machine works by taking measurements of your breaths whilst blowing hard and for as long as you can into a tube attached to the Spirometer. The machine records how well you are breathing and how much air you have been able to breathe. The results obtained can quickly pick up any problems affecting the lungs and are reported to your doctor.

Many patients with an underlying asbestos-related condition will undergo this procedure as it gives accurate information to the doctors involved in your care and provides guidance on how best to manage your condition.

Other less common investigations

PET scan (Positron Emission Tomography)

A PET scan is a less common investigation and only a few hospitals around the country have these scanners.

It can assist with diagnosing cancer and determining what stage cancer is at. It can also be used to help determine whether any cancer treatment is working.

Undergoing a PET scan will involve you having an injection of a radioactive dye. The dye helps highlight cancerous areas.

A PET scan can help to inform any decisions on the management of your condition.



Notes



The main objective of **Clydeside Action on Asbestos** is to provide advice, support and information to those affected by a diagnosis of an asbestos related condition.

The charity has a Welfare Rights Service, campaigns to influence legislation and policy and works in partnership with healthcare professionals within the NHS to produce publications, host conferences, run support groups and receive referrals.

Our Welfare Rights team provide information and assistance with obtaining entitlement to state benefits and compensation.

We have been assisting people with asbestos related disease and their families for over 25 years and have a well established reputation for providing expert advice and assistance to people whose lives are affected by a diagnosis of an asbestos related condition.



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