

Autonomic Reflex Laboratory

What is the autonomic nervous system?

The autonomic nervous system controls:

- Blood pressure
- Blood flow
- Sweating
- Bowel and Bladder function
- Sexual function

What can I expect during the tests?

All the tests can be done during the same visit. The tests are safe and not invasive, and are usually completed in less than 90 minutes.

Sweat Test:

For this test small plastic capsules are attached to the arms and legs. A machine stimulates the sweat glands and measures sweat production. You may feel a slight burning during this test.

Deep Breathing Test:

This test measures your heart rate during deep breathing.

Valsalva Test:

During this test you blow into a plastic tube for 15 seconds. This test measures your blood pressure and heart rate.

The Table Test:

After lying on a table for the first part of the test, you will be raised to a nearly upright position. You will be secured to the table so you cannot fall. The test will measure your blood pressure and pulse.

How will my doctor use this information?

These tests will determine whether your autonomic nervous system is working normally. The results may help to make a diagnosis and to show how you will respond to certain treatments. The type of treatment will depend on the diagnosis, and your signs and symptoms.

Are there medications I should avoid before testing?

There are a number of medications that would cause the test to be inaccurate. They include:

- Common cold remedies
- Drugs for depression
- Drugs for hypertension
- Parkinson's disease
- Drugs for pain

When your test is scheduled, you will be asked to call the Autonomic Laboratory to review your medications before the test.

Always talk with your doctor before stopping any medications.

Are there other special preparations?

If your test is in the morning, do not eat food for 12 hours before the tests.

If your test is in the afternoon, eat a light breakfast four to six hours before the tests.

No alcohol, caffeine or nicotine for 12 hours before the tests.

No vigorous exercise for 24 hours.

No evidence of other illness for 48 hours.

Wear soft, non-restrictive clothing. Avoid clothing that may restrict blood flow, including stockings and corsets. Remove elastic stockings.

Try to avoid circumstances that would cause stress. Your test will be more successful if you are rested and relaxed.

Arrive early.

What are the common signs and symptoms of damage to the autonomic nerves?

The signs and symptoms of autonomic nerve damage depend on which parts of your autonomic system are affected. They include:

- A drop in blood pressure when you stand. This is called orthostatic hypotension. This can cause dizziness and fainting.
- Trouble urinating. This includes diminished feeling, urine leaking from a full bladder and inability to empty your bladder completely. This can cause urinary tract infections.
- Male impotence
- Vaginal dryness
- Problems with arousal and orgasm in women.
- Problem digesting food (gastroparesis). This can cause
 - Diarrhea
 - Constipation
 - Abdominal bloating
 - Nausea
 - Vomiting
 - Heartburn
 - Feeling full after eating small amounts of food
 - Loss of appetite
- Cardiovascular problems, like heart rate problems
- Heat intolerance, especially during exercise
- Abnormal sweating (usually decreased)
- Slow pupil reaction to light and dark

- Exercise intolerance. This causes your heart rate to remain the same instead of increasing or decreasing due to your activity level.
- Lack of the usual warning signs of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), including shakiness, sweating and palpitations.

Are there medical conditions where autonomic testing should not be done, or would be unreliable?

Yes. You should not have testing done if you have: atrial fibrillation, cardiac failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or SICCA syndrome (combination of dry eyes and mouth plus diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or scleroderma).

Who orders the test?

These tests are usually ordered by a neurologist, but may be ordered by a patient's primary care provider.

How is the test scheduled?

Your provider can contact Bronson Scheduling at (269) 341-8700.

Are the tests covered by insurance?

Patients should check with their insurance company to verify coverage for autonomic testing before scheduling the appointment.

To schedule an appointment call (269) 341-8700.