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What to Expect During Your EMG Test

Electrodiagnostic medicine studies diseases of the nerves and muscles. The EMG test your doctor has recommended studies if your muscles and nerves are working right. You can have problems with your muscles and nerves in only one part of your body or throughout your body. The EMG doctor examines you to decide what tests to do. The results of the tests will help your doctor decide what is wrong and how it can be treated.

Why am I being sent for an EMG?

You are being sent for an EMG because you have numbness, tingling, pain, weakness, and/or muscle cramping. Some of the tests that the EMG doctor may use to diagnose your symptoms are nerve conduction studies (NCSs), or needle EMGs.

- Nerve Conduction Studies show how well the body's electrical signals are traveling to a nerve. This is done by applying small electric shocks to the nerve and recording how the nerve works. These shocks cause a quick, mild, tingling feeling. The doctor may test several nerves.

- Needle EMG (Electromyography) for this part of the exam, a small thin needle is inserted into several muscles to see if there are any problems. A new needle is used for each patient, and it is thrown away after the test. There may be a small amount of pain when the needle is put in. The doctor examines only the muscles necessary to decide what is wrong. The doctor will look at and listen to the electrical signals that travel from the needle to the EMG machine. The doctor then reads the signals.

How long will these tests take?

The test usually takes 30 minutes. You can do any of your normal activities, like eating, driving, and exercising, before and after the tests. There are no lasting side effects.

How should I prepare for the tests?

Tell the EMG doctor if you are taking aspirin, blood thinners (like Coumadin), have a pace maker, or have hemophilia. Take a bath or shower to remove oil from your skin. Do not use body lotion or powder on the day of the test. If you have myasthenia gravis, ask your EMG doctor if you should take any medication before the test.

When will I know the test results?

The EMG doctor will discuss your test results with you or send them to your referring doctor. After the exam, check with the doctor who sent you for the test for the next step in your care.

Please arrive early for this test. Patients arriving late or missing appointments may have to wait several weeks for rescheduling.