

# 1mg Overnight Dexamethasone

## Suppression Test — Patient Instructions

### WHAT IS THIS TEST?

Your doctor has ordered a **1mg overnight dexamethasone suppression test (DST)** to screen for **Cushing's syndrome** — a condition caused by excess cortisol in the body. Dexamethasone is a steroid that, in healthy people, suppresses the body's own cortisol production overnight. A blood cortisol level is then measured the next morning. This test requires careful preparation — please read these instructions fully.

### STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Obtain the dexamethasone tablet**  
Your doctor or pharmacist will provide a 1mg dexamethasone tablet. Confirm you have it in hand before the evening of the test.
- 2 Take dexamethasone between 11:00 PM and midnight**  
Swallow the tablet with a small glass of plain water between 11:00 PM and 12:00 midnight. Set a phone alarm so you don't miss the window. Taking it significantly earlier or later affects test accuracy.
- 3 Fast from midnight until after your blood draw**  
Do not eat or drink anything except plain water after midnight. No food, coffee, juice, tea, or other beverages. Water is fine.
- 4 Blood draw between 8:00 AM and 9:00 AM**  
Go to the lab for your cortisol blood draw between 8:00 and 9:00 AM the following morning. This timing window is critical — cortisol peaks naturally in the morning and the test is calibrated to this window.
- 5 Inform the lab**  
Tell the phlebotomist: "This is a post-dexamethasone cortisol test." This ensures it is labeled and processed correctly.

### IMPORTANT: WHAT TO AVOID

■ **Corticosteroids — DO NOT take**

Do not take prednisone, hydrocortisone, methylprednisolone, or dexamethasone on the morning of the test. These will directly falsify your result. If you take them for a medical condition, call your doctor's office before the test day.

■ **Estrogen-containing medications**

Birth control pills, the patch, NuvaRing, and estrogen hormone therapy can raise cortisol-binding globulin and falsely elevate your result. Discuss this with your doctor — they may ask you to pause estrogen 4–6 weeks before testing.

■ **Alcohol**

Avoid alcohol for at least 24 hours before the test.

■ **Caffeine on the morning of the test**

Hold coffee, tea, and caffeinated beverages until after your blood draw.

■ **Other interfering medications**

Phenytoin, rifampin, carbamazepine, and some antifungals can affect dexamethasone metabolism. Bring a full medication list to your appointment and ask your doctor if anything needs to be adjusted.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR RESULTS

Your doctor will review your results and contact you. Here is what the cortisol level generally means:

**NORMAL — Suppressed**

**Cortisol < 1.8 mcg/dL**

The dexamethasone suppressed cortisol as expected. This is a reassuring result. Cushing's syndrome is unlikely.

**ABNORMAL — Failed Suppression**

**Cortisol >= 1.8 mcg/dL**

Further evaluation is needed. An abnormal result does NOT confirm Cushing's — it means additional testing is necessary. False positives are common.

■ **An abnormal result does NOT mean you have Cushing's syndrome.** The 1mg DST is a *screening* test. It is intentionally sensitive to avoid missing cases, which also means it has a meaningful false-positive rate — especially in patients with obesity, depression, chronic stress, or poor sleep. Many people with an abnormal result will have normal confirmatory testing.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q: Does the pill have to be taken at exactly 11 PM?**

It should be taken between 11:00 PM and midnight. This timing lets the blood draw coincide with the natural morning cortisol peak ~8 hours later. Set a phone alarm to be sure.

**Q: Can I take my regular medications before the blood draw?**

Hold non-essential medications until after your draw unless your doctor says otherwise. Most importantly, do NOT take corticosteroids (prednisone, hydrocortisone, etc.) that morning — they directly interfere with results.

**Q: I'm on birth control pills. Will that affect the test?**

Yes. Estrogen can raise a protein called cortisol-binding globulin, causing falsely elevated cortisol. Your doctor may ask you to stop estrogen-containing contraception 4–6 weeks before testing. Do not stop without guidance.

**Q: What if I forgot to take the pill?**

If you missed it entirely or took it well after midnight, call the clinic to reschedule. The test cannot be reliably interpreted with incorrect timing.

**Q: I have diabetes. Will dexamethasone affect my blood sugar?**

Yes — a single dose of dexamethasone can raise blood sugar overnight. Check your glucose as usual the next morning before the blood draw, and take your diabetes medications after the test as instructed.

**Q: I've been very stressed / not sleeping well. Will that affect results?**

Yes. Severe stress, poor sleep, depression, chronic anxiety, major illness, and recent surgery can all temporarily elevate cortisol and produce a false-positive result. Discuss this with your doctor before testing.

**Q: Can I drive myself to the lab?**

Yes. The 1mg dose does not cause sedation or impairment. You may drive yourself without concern.

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**Questions? Contact Us**

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