Can my child be tested for NSAID intolerance?

The mechanism underlying NSAID intolerance is not fully understood. Therefore, blood or skin tests are usually not beneficial. A thorough medical history is enough to make a diagnosis. Oftentimes, if the history is uncertain, the child may undergo an oral challenge test under the supervision of a paediatrician specialising in allergy to evaluate for sensitivity or tolerance to a specific NSAID.

Other Instructions

The information provided in this publication is meant purely for educational purposes and may not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. You should seek the advice of your doctor or a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.

Information is correct at the time of printing (Dec 2019) and subject to revision without prior notice.

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MRT Kent Ridge MRT Station @ Level 1

A Linkway @ Level 1 via MRT station (Exit A)
B Linkway @ Level 1
C Linkway @ Level 4
D Linkway @ Level 1
E Linkway @ Level 2
TAXI Taxi Stand / Drop-Off
Drop-off Point
Bus Stop
P Carpark

About the Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children's Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI)

The KTP-NUCMI is the paediatric arm of the National University Hospital and comprises the Departments of Paediatrics, Paediatric Surgery and Neonatology. We provide comprehensive and specialised medical and surgical services for newborns, children and adolescents, and are the only public hospital in Singapore that offers paediatric kidney and liver transplant programmes. Through a generous gift from the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat, we have set up an integrated outpatient facility with medical, diagnostic and rehabilitation services.

For more information about us, visit www.nuh.com.sg/nuhkids.

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National University Hospital

NSAID Intolerance

(Sensitivity to painkillers)

I CAN! The Children's Asthma and Allergy Network

Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children's Medical Institute

What are NSAIDs?

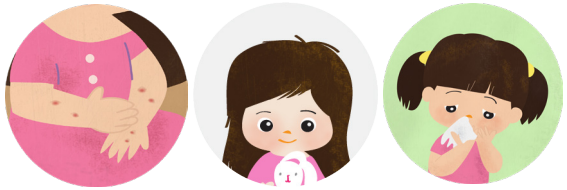
Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) include a number of medications that are related to each other such as aspirin, ibuprofen and diclofenac which are used for inflammation, pain and fever.

How common is NSAID intolerance?

NSAID intolerance affects about 1% of the normal population. However, the risk is higher if your child has asthma, chronic sinusitis or nasal polypis.

What symptoms are seen in NSAID intolerance?

Many different reactions have been reported, from mildly troublesome to more severe symptoms. The most common reactions include skin symptoms such as hives, face and eye swelling, flushing (sudden reddening of the face, neck or upper chest), itchy or red eyes, blocked or runny nose, difficulty in breathing or a drop in blood pressure which may cause a person to faint.



How is NSAID intolerance treated?

Avoidance of all NSAIDs is the usual treatment for NSAID intolerance. It is important to be aware of the numerous medications that contain aspirin or related NSAIDs. In addition to avoidance, it is also recommended that NSAID-intolerant patients carry a medic alert card to alert emergency personnel of their condition in the event that they are unable to communicate.

Sometimes, an NSAID is a required therapy for certain medical conditions. A desensitisation procedure is possible for these patients and should only be performed by a drug allergy specialist skilled in the desensitisation. Once desensitised, the patient is able to continue taking the medication.

If my child is intolerant to NSAIDs, can he or she take different brands of painkillers?

Always be alert and talk to your child's doctor or pharmacist before giving him or her any new prescription or over-the-counter medication. NSAIDs may be found in many medications including those used to relieve headache, joint pain, sinus pain, fever or tummy upset.

What drugs are "safe" for a person with NSAID intolerance?

Generally, paracetamol (acetaminophen) is safely tolerated and is considered the drug of choice for NSAID-intolerant patients. For older children or adults who need pain relieving medicines, Cox-2 inhibitors are usually well tolerated too. However, it is recommended to administer the first full dose of these medications in a doctor's office. Most narcotics such as morphine and codeine are safe with the exception of some combination products containing NSAIDs.

It is recommended that any person with known or suspected NSAID intolerance should consult their doctor or a paediatrician specialising in allergy before using any product that may be related to NSAIDs.

Paracetamol Intolerance

Paracetamol intolerance is less common but still occurs in our population. Its mechanism is similar to that of NSAID intolerance. If your child is paracetamol-intolerant, he or she will be NSAID-intolerant as well and should not take NSAIDs. If your child is found to have NSAID intolerance, there is only a small chance that he or she will be paracetamol-intolerant. Please consult a paediatrician specialising in allergy if you are not sure what drugs are safe for your child.