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Multiple Sleep Latency Test (MSLT)

What is an MSLT?

An MSLT is a test to measure how long it takes you to fall asleep. It is performed for diagnosing narcolepsy (extreme tendency to fall asleep) and excessive daytime sleepiness.

What happens during the MSLT?

The MSLT consists of an overnight sleep recording and four multiple nap opportunities with breaks of two hours in between them the next day. You will come to the EEG department first before going to the ward for the overnight recording.

You will not feel any pain during the MSLT. Sensors are attached to your head, face and chin using a special type of glue called collodion. These sensors send tiny electrical signals to the computer. The signals show when you are asleep and awake during the study. At the start of each study you will be asked to move your eyes, and clench your teeth. This will make sure the sensors are working. A low-light video camera allows a clinical physiologist to see you.

For each nap trial you are asked to lie quietly in bed and try to go to sleep. Then the lights are dimmed. Once the lights are dimmed, the test will measure how long it takes you to fall asleep.

After sleeping for 15 minutes, you will be awakened. Each trial will end if you do not fall asleep within 20 minutes. Between nap trials, you will have to stay out of bed and occupy yourself so that you can remain awake.

Will I be able to leave the department?

You need to be monitored all day to ensure that you do not fall asleep between naps. You can move around the hospital in which the test is being carried out and around the department. You can also go outside for short periods.

What happens after the MSLT?

A special solvent is used to remove the glue when the recordings have finished. Fragments of glue may remain in your hair and it may take several hair washes and combs to remove it all. Once the sensors have been removed you will be free to go home, this will be around 4:00pm depending on the time at which the first nap trial started.

The information collected during the MSLT will be analysed and a full report will be sent to the doctor who referred you for the test.