



WHAT IS A SLEEP STUDY?

A sleep study is a medical test where sleep is monitored to assist with the diagnosis of sleep problems.

It may be done at home or by staying overnight or during the day in a specialist sleep clinic. There are a number of types of sleep studies such as Polysomnography (PSG), Multiple Sleep Latency Test (MSLT) and Maintenance of Wakefulness Test (MWT).

Sleep Studies



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WHAT DOES A POLYSOMNOGRAPHY (PSG) INVOLVE?

Patients usually arrive in the early evening and go home upon waking up in the morning.

Trained technicians at the sleep clinic will apply a number of leads on the head and body to measure quality and quantity of sleep using creams and tape. They will also attach a nasal airflow piece, a belt around the waist and chest, and a probe on the finger which will record signals to monitor breathing and oxygen levels in the blood. Most clinics will also record heart rate, leg movements, sleeping position and snoring. They will also video record your sleep to see if you move a lot during sleep and how restless you are.

DURING THE PSG

The sleep clinic is a carefully controlled environment. The results from a study here will be indicative of a typical night at home. The staff will constantly watch all the signals collected. If you are staying overnight in a sleep unit, the technicians will come in during the night to reattach any leads that may have fallen off. Being in an unfamiliar environment can be difficult for some patients. Those who are sick, have dependents or can not stay overnight outside their own home may be offered a home sleep study.

WHAT DOES A HOME SLEEP STUDY INVOLVE?

A number of hospitals and private clinics offer home sleep studies. Patients go to the clinic during the day and have monitoring leads attached, or they may be taught how to put the leads on themselves. These leads are almost the same as those which are used for a study done overnight in the clinic but patients can walk around and sleep in their own beds. Signals may be lost during the home test and sometimes they need to be repeated. Some rarer sleep conditions may not be picked up during a home sleep study but would be detected by a PSG.

WHAT DOES THE SLEEP STUDY TELL YOUR DOCTOR?

The signals from the brain show when you are asleep and when you wake up. Breathing signals and oxygen levels give information about breathing during sleep. Some patients have stop-start breathing during the night, a disorder called sleep apnea. The leg leads show if there is any movement or twitching, which may disturb sleep. A sleep study can also pick up other rarer sleep problems.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF A SLEEP STUDY?

Having a PSG is very safe. The PSG is a very commonly used technique with thousands of tests being performed across Australia every week. The cream used to attach leads may cause temporary skin irritation in some patients, but nothing done in a sleep study is invasive or painful.

HOW TO GET READY FOR THE SLEEP STUDY

The sleep study clinic will give you information about what you need to do and bring to your study. Usually, there are no special things that you need to do beforehand - you should try and do exactly what you do on a normal day.

Treat the night as a sleepover.

WHAT IS A MULTIPLE SLEEP LATENCY TEST (MSLT)?

This is a test to see how sleepy you are during the day. It is the diagnostic test for daytime sleep conditions such as narcolepsy and idiopathic hypersomnolence and it is performed after the PSG. After having an overnight PSG, waking up and having some breakfast, the technician will attach the leads on your head, taking away the breathing monitors i.e. nose piece, chest and abdomen belts and the finger oxygen probe. You will then be asked every two hours, on four or five occasions during the day, to “try and fall asleep”.

The technicians will determine how quickly you fall asleep and whether you enter REM sleep after 20 minutes of trying to fall asleep. If you are not asleep within 20 minutes, the technician will discontinue the test.

You must avoid any caffeine drinks and stimulant tablets. If you have been on such medications, the sleep specialist will advise how long to stop these for before taking the MSLT. Also you must not nap between the allocated 20 minutes sleep times otherwise this will affect the results.

It is common to ask for a urine sample as a drug screen to ensure you have not taken any medication or drugs that may affect sleep and affect the sleep study results. Most MSLT tests will be finished by 5pm, when you are free to go home. You will be advised to take a day off work or school if you are doing the MSLT. We will arrange food and drinks during the day. Bring reading material or a lap top. Some facilities may have Wi-Fi access.

WHAT IS A MAINTENANCE OF WAKEFULNESS TEST (MWT)?

This test is very similar to the MSLT, taking place during the day. Unlike the MSLT, it is a test to see how awake you can remain when asked to sit still in a darkened room. The test is commonly used to see if individuals are safe to drive, or can maintain wakefulness and also whether medications are working sufficiently. The timeframe you are asked to stay awake for is up to 40 minutes, four times during the day. Also like the MSLT, this test is carried out after the PSG.

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