



# **Diagnostic Work-Up for Chronic Beryllium Disease**

## **Medical Procedures to Confirm a Diagnosis of CBD**

If the results of your Beryllium Lymphocyte Proliferation Test (BeLPT) determine that you have become sensitized to beryllium, you should consider consulting a private health care provider about undergoing further medical evaluation and additional medical tests. This will help determine if you have a health problem and if it is Chronic Beryllium Disease (CBD).

A health care provider who is familiar with Chronic Beryllium Disease should ask you questions about your health and perform a comprehensive examination, with special emphasis on your lungs. The function of your lungs may be tested by exercise tolerance testing, a much more sophisticated version of spirometry (the breathing test in which you blow into a tube). If the degree of change to your lungs is still uncertain, you may be offered a high-resolution CT scan or other imaging study to take a picture of your lungs. One procedure that may be recommended is called a bronchoscopy, which allows a doctor to look directly into your lungs with a fiber-optic device. The doctor passes a flexible tube through your nose into your throat and windpipes, which, using the fiber-optic "eye," inspects the lungs. Some cells (lymphocytes) will be washed out and later tested to see if they are sensitized to beryllium. The doctor can also take small samples of tissue called biopsies; these samples are then examined at a laboratory to look for evidence of Chronic Beryllium Disease.

Before the bronchoscopy, you will be given a local anesthetic to numb both your nose and throat. During the procedure, you may be given a relaxant intravenously to keep you more comfortable. The bronchoscopy tube will be passed through your nose into your throat and then gradually lowered to explore your windpipes and lungs. The test takes about 30- 60 minutes. Most people tolerate it well.

When you go for the procedure, you may be given a fact sheet that discusses it further and lists the unlikely but possible risks associated with the procedure. You should be asked to sign a consent form. Of course, you can refuse to have any procedure at any time.

You should talk with the doctor immediately after the procedure and again when the laboratory results are back. Please ask the doctor any questions you have about the procedure and the results.

## **Diagnostic Tests and Treatment**

The course of Chronic Beryllium Disease is variable, ranging from a stable condition controllable with prescription medications to a poorly controlled, progressive condition that is debilitating. Progressive, poorly controlled CBD can be fatal. It is not possible to predict how CBD will affect a particular individual.

Some people can be diagnosed with the disease but have no symptoms. If you do not have any symptoms, you probably will not require treatment and Chronic Beryllium Disease will probably have little effect on your life. Even so, you should see a health care professional regularly to monitor the disease.

Treatment with a group of drugs called corticosteroids ("steroids"), such as prednisone, may be advised for those with symptoms of, or breathing tests that show Chronic Beryllium Disease. (These "steroids" are not the same as the ones you hear about athletes using.) Corticosteroids reduce inflammation and are believed to help keep the condition from progressing. Any decision to use steroids or any other medications should be made after discussing possible side effects with your doctor.

Any person with a lung condition, including Chronic Beryllium Disease, may benefit from pneumonia and flu vaccinations and early treatment of respiratory infections.

If you smoke cigarettes, try to STOP. This is especially important for those with lung disease. Exposure to beryllium may increase a person's chances of getting lung cancer. It is important to eliminate additional lung cancer risks such as smoking.

If your BeLPT results are confirmed reactive, the Office of Occupational Medicine will notify your Regional Administrator or National Office Director who can follow the procedure in the CSHO Medical Examination program to request an appropriate accommodation for you.

**Chronic Beryllium Disease occurs only in people who have been exposed to beryllium, so most primary care health care providers have not had the opportunity to treat individuals with CBD. For this reason, you may wish to consult a health care provider who is familiar with Chronic Beryllium Disease. Be sure to check if your medical insurance covers any health care provider visits that you schedule, although you may be eligible for medical coverage under the Workers' Compensation Program if you are sensitized to beryllium or if you are diagnosed with Chronic Beryllium Disease.**

**Most exposures to beryllium occur in the workplace. However, there are documented cases in which beryllium-sensitization and/or Chronic Beryllium Disease have occurred in persons with no known occupational exposure to beryllium.**



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