

Compartment Pressure Testing

At UW Medicine Sports Medicine Center

This handout explains a procedure called compartment pressure testing. It tells how to prepare for the procedure and what to expect afterward.

What is compartment pressure testing?

Compartment pressure testing measures the pressure in the muscles of your lower legs. This test will tell your provider if you have a rare condition called *chronic exertional compartment syndrome (CECS)*.

What is CECS?

Many athletes have pain in their lower legs when exercising. It is common among people who run for their sport. This pain may have several causes, one of which may be CECS.

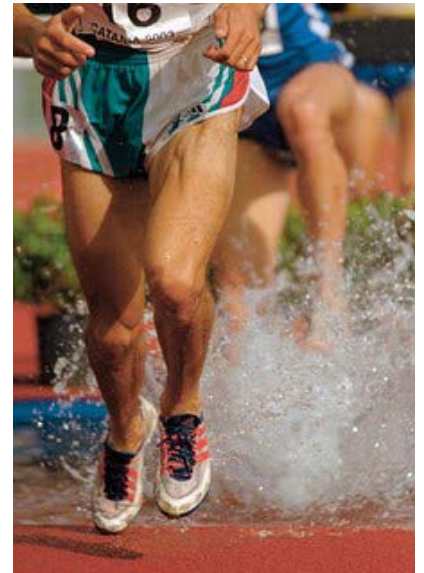
CECS is a rare condition. It occurs when pressure builds up in the muscle compartments of the lower leg. This pressure pushes on blood vessels, which then affects muscles and nerves in the area. When this happens, you can feel pain, numbness, tightness, and sometimes weakness in your legs when you exercise.

How is the testing done?

To find out if you have CECS, we first ask you about your symptoms and give you a physical exam. If we think you may have CECS, we will then do compartment pressure testing to confirm the diagnosis.

Most times, we test both legs to compare the pressures. We may also test up to 4 compartments in each leg, depending on your symptoms.

- First, we will clean your skin in the areas that will be tested. We will inject a numbing medicine into your skin in those areas so that you will not feel as much pain when we insert the needle into your muscles for the test.



Many athletes have pain in their lower legs when they exercise.

- Your provider will then carefully insert a special needle into your lower leg muscles. The needle is attached to a device that measures the pressure in your leg muscles. This first reading shows the pressure in your legs when you are at rest.
- You will then run on a treadmill until you feel pain in your lower legs.
- Your provider will then insert the needle into your lower legs one more time. An abnormally increased pressure reading means that you have CECS.

How do I prepare for the test?

When you come to the clinic for your test:

- Wear comfortable exercise clothes.
- It is best to wear shorts so the testing can be done easily.
- Wear the shoes that you usually run in.

How is CECS treated?

If you have CECS, we will talk with you about treatments. Your options may include modifying your activity, physical therapy exercises, and surgery.

How do I schedule the test?

To schedule this test, please call the UW Medicine Sports Medicine Center at 206.598.DAWG (3294), and press 2 when you hear the recording.

What can I expect after the procedure?

You may feel sore where the needles were inserted. Most times, this soreness does not last long. You should not need pain medicine.

Can I drive myself home after the testing?

Most people can drive after compartment testing. Check with your provider to be sure.

Is compartment pressure testing covered by insurance?

Most insurance policies cover this procedure. To make sure, ask your healthcare provider for billing information at least a few days before the procedure. Then, call your insurance company and ask about coverage.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

UW Medicine Sports Medicine Center: Call 206.598.DAWG (3294) and press 2.