

## What If An Abnormality Is Found?

The results will be explained by your doctor or by an experienced counsellor. He or she will describe the abnormality that has been found and explain how it may affect the infant.

## Conclusion

The triple test is a screening test which classifies women into high and low risk groups. Women at higher risk are offered further investigations to determine whether abnormalities are present or not. Those at low risk can be reassured that these adverse outcomes are unlikely.

## Why will I receive an account?

There will be an out-of-pocket charge (For details of the exact cost, see our Billing Guide for Out Patients, **My Pathology Test - What will it cost?**) for this test for all patients. You will receive an account. Medicare will reimburse a percentage of this and you will be responsible for the out-of-pocket expense. In line with our normal billing policy, current Health Care Cardholders, Pension Cardholders and Veterans with Gold Cards will be exempt from this out-of-pocket charge.



\* see our pamphlet on Amnio Express QF-PCR

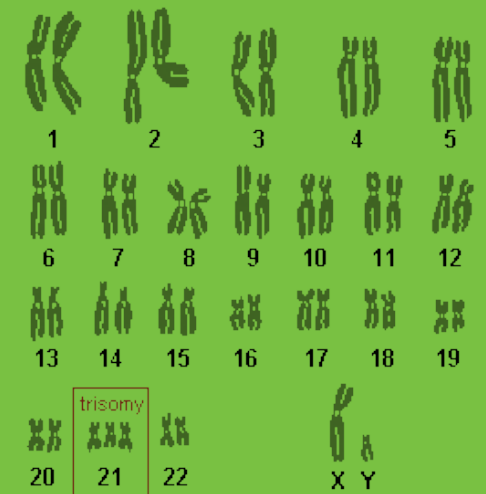
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# Understanding Triple Test Pregnancy Screening

## Information for Patients



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**The Triple Test has important implications for you and your family. This brochure explains how the Triple Test is performed and what the results mean. Before undergoing this test it is very important you have discussed this testing procedure with your doctor.**

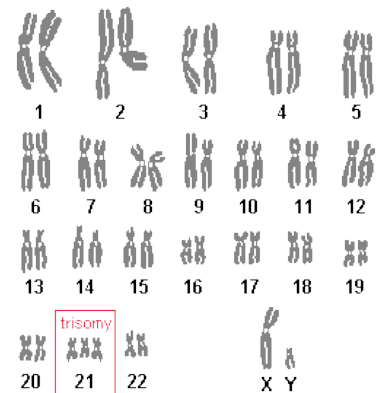
## What is Triple Test Pregnancy Screening?

Most pregnancies result in the delivery of a normal healthy baby. However, a small number of babies are not completely healthy, either physically or developmentally. Two important types of birth defect are Down Syndrome and Neural Tube Defects. The Triple Test can be used in pregnancy to help to identify women who may be carrying babies with these disorders.

## Down Syndrome

Down Syndrome occurs in about 1 in every 700 pregnancies and is a chromosomal abnormality which is an important cause of congenital intellectual disability. Chromosomes contain the genetic information we require to grow and develop normally. Each cell contains 23 pairs of chromosomes.

Down Syndrome usually occurs by having 3 copies of chromosome 21. What causes this replication is still unknown; no racial, geographical, social, economic or environmental factors have been identified.



Chances of having a baby with Down Syndrome increase as a mother gets older, but a child with Down Syndrome can be born to a mother of any age.

## Neural Tube Defects

### *spinabifida and anencephaly*

About two infants in every thousand born in Australia have a neural tube defect. Neural tube defects are abnormalities of the development of the skull or spine, which may involve damage to the brain and spinal cord.

*There are two major types:*

**Anencephaly**, in which the skull and brain do not form properly. The rest of the body and the face are usually normal. Babies with anencephaly are usually stillborn or die soon after birth because of the severity of the defect.

**Spina bifida**, in which part of the spine is not formed properly. Babies with spina bifida usually have some physical problems. These problems may include excess fluid around the brain, leg weakness, poor feeling in the legs, lack of bowel or bladder control and sexual dysfunction. Some of the children with milder cases may only have minor problems with weakness and control of the legs.

## Other conditions that may be detected

Other conditions may be detected by the triple test. These include rarer chromosomal conditions and other physical defects. Some of these, although serious, can be corrected with surgery.

## What does the lab test?

The Triple Test is a blood test that measures the level of three proteins in the mother's blood (this is why the test is called the triple test). These proteins are known as AFP, HCG and E3.

## When is the Test Performed?

The test should be done between 15 and 18 weeks of pregnancy. Because normal levels of these proteins change during pregnancy, it is very important that the laboratory knows exactly how many weeks pregnant the mother is at the time the blood test is taken. If the date of the last menstrual period is uncertain, an ultrasound examination may be worthwhile to establish the age of the fetus.

## How Does The Triple Test Work?

The triple test is a screening test. It does not give you a "yes" or "no" answer. It tells you the likelihood (risk) of delivering a baby with Down Syndrome or a neural tube defect. Women who are identified at being of high risk need further tests to determine which women in the high risk group really have an abnormality.

## What Does A Low Risk Result Mean?

More than 9 out of every 10 mothers will have a low risk result. This does not completely rule out the possibility of neural tube defect or Down Syndrome, but the risk for these pregnancies is very low. Only one woman in over 2500 screened as low risk will carry a Down Syndrome child. It is even less likely that a neural tube defect will be missed because almost all cases of anencephaly are detected by the screening test, as are over 70% of cases of spina bifida.

## What Does A High Risk Result Mean?

If a mother has a high risk result, it does not mean that the pregnancy is definitely abnormal. It only means that there is an increased risk of abnormality, and that further tests are needed in order to decide whether the pregnancy is normal or not. The further tests may include:

1. *A detailed, specialist, ultrasound examination which can detect anencephaly and almost all cases of spina bifida. This examination will also confirm the pregnancy dates.*
2. *Amniocentesis, in which a small amount of the fluid from around the baby is taken to test for chromosome abnormalities including Down Syndrome. There is a small risk of miscarriage with amniocentesis (estimated as less than one in two hundred).*
3. *Chromosome analysis, where the baby's cells are analysed for their chromosomal makeup. Final results from the chromosomal analysis may take 2-3 weeks. Sometimes an interim result may be available in a few days if specialised 'Amnio Express QF-PCR\* testing is requested.*