

### What is diagnostic testing?

Pathology testing and medical imaging are types of diagnostic tests. They involve examining parts or products of the body to diagnose and treat disease.

- **Pathology testing** involves examining samples of bodily tissues and fluids.
- **Medical imaging** involves taking pictures of the body's internal structures using x-rays, ultrasounds, CT or MRI scans, and other techniques.

There are many different diagnostic tests. In Australia, some of these are subsidised by Medicare, allowing patients to access that service without paying the full cost.

### When is it appropriate to have a diagnostic test?

GPs have many years of training in selecting and scheduling diagnostic tests. There are several questions that GPs consider when deciding whether to order a particular test.

1. Is the test likely to be useful in the patient's diagnosis or treatment?
2. Is the test likely to give accurate results?
3. Are the benefits of the patient having the test likely to be greater than any risks or costs associated with the test?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, it is best to avoid the test.

It is especially important for GPs to consider whether the results will provide information that is relevant to the patient's medical treatment before ordering tests through Medicare. This is because GPs have a responsibility to spend Medicare's money wisely. They must not use this money to pay for tests that are unlikely to help them to treat the patient.

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### Questions to ask your GP

#### Do I need this test?

Talk to your GP about what you want to learn from the test and how you think having the test might improve your health.

#### What are the risks involved in having this test?

In some situations, having a test can be harmful, such as when the results lead the patient to have unnecessary treatment. Your GP can provide information about potential harms and help you decide whether the benefits of having a test are likely to outweigh the risks and costs.

#### What will this test cost?

Medicare will pay the costs associated with a number of diagnostic tests. If a test is not subsidised by Medicare but it is available in Australia and your health practitioner is willing to order it, you will need to pay all the costs yourself. In some cases, testing can be very expensive.

#### Are there other options for me?

Your GP may know of alternatives to testing that are simpler, cheaper, more accurate, or more useful. Ask about the risks and benefits of these options.

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### More information

#### Choosing Wisely Australia

[www.choosingwisely.org.au](http://www.choosingwisely.org.au)

#### Lab Tests Online

[www.labtestsonline.org.au](http://www.labtestsonline.org.au)

#### Inside Radiology

[www.insideradiology.com.au](http://www.insideradiology.com.au)

#### Consumers Health Forum of Australia

[www.chf.org.au](http://www.chf.org.au)