

Thalassemia Trait Testing

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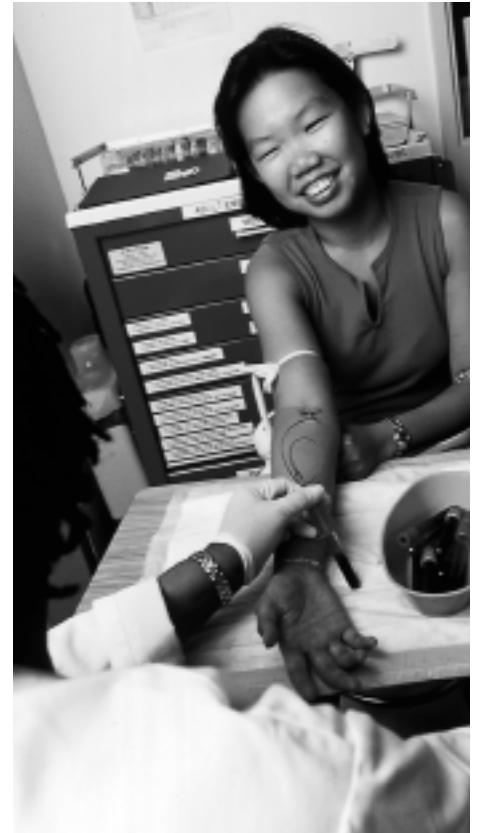
If you have a routine blood test known as a Complete Blood Count (CBC) already on file at your doctor's office, ask your doctor to look at the Mean Corpuscular Volume (MCV). The MCV reading determines the size of your red blood cells. For adults, if the MCV reading is less than 75 and you are not iron deficient, you may be a thalassemia trait carrier. For children, the MCV reading may be lower and varies according to their age.

If your MCV reading indicates that you may have thalassemia trait, your doctor should then perform additional blood tests to confirm if you have thalassemia trait and to determine whether it is alpha or beta.

Special blood tests called hemoglobin electrophoresis and quantitation of hemoglobin A2 and hemoglobin F are a reliable way of determining whether or not a person has the trait for beta thalassemia (beta thalassemia minor). These blood tests are available at most large hospitals and clinics.

Testing for alpha thalassemia trait (alpha thalassemia minor) is usually done by a process of exclusion. People who have low MCV (not due to iron deficiency), normal hemoglobin electrophoresis, normal quantitative hemoglobin A2 and normal quantitative hemoglobin F, and are of the appropriate ethnic origin are presumed to have alpha thalassemia minor.

In some circumstances, more definitive "molecular" testing is



performed to determine the presence or absence of thalassemia trait. As these genetic tests are developed further, they will be used more widely to test for thalassemia trait.

Remember that the first step to finding out if you have the thalassemia trait is easy. Just call your doctor and ask him or her to check your MCV reading. Testing for thalassemia can be done at most hospitals. When you go in for your test, bring this handout with you to share with your doctor.

For more information about thalassemia, please contact:
Cooley's Anemia Foundation at
(800) 522-7222 or
info@cooleysanemia.org
You can also visit our web site at
www.cooleysanemia.org.



Cooley's Anemia
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