

Overview

Useful For

Monitoring nortriptyline concentration during therapy

Evaluating potential nortriptyline toxicity

The test may also be useful to evaluate patient compliance

Method Name

Liquid Chromatography-Tandem Mass Spectrometry (LC-MS/MS)

NY State Available

Yes

Specimen

Specimen Type

Serum Red

Specimen Required

**Collection Container/Tube:** Red top (Serum gel/SST are **not acceptable**)

**Submission Container/Tube:** Plastic vial

**Specimen Volume:** 1 mL

**Collection Instructions:**

1. Collect specimen immediately before next scheduled dose (minimum 12 hours after last dose).
2. Centrifuge and aliquot serum into plastic vial. **Serum must be separated from cells within 2 hours of collection.**

Forms

If not ordering electronically, complete, print, and send a [Therapeutics Test Request](#) (T831) with the specimen.

Specimen Minimum Volume

0.25 mL

Reject Due To

Gross hemolysis	Reject
Gross lipemia	Reject
Gross icterus	Reject

Specimen Stability Information

Specimen Type	Temperature	Time	Special Container
Serum Red	Refrigerated (preferred)	28 days	
	Frozen	28 days	
	Ambient	7 days	

Clinical & Interpretive

Clinical Information

Nortriptyline is a tricyclic antidepressant used for treatment of endogenous depression. It also is a metabolite of the antidepressant amitriptyline. Nortriptyline is used when its stimulatory side effect is considered to be of clinical advantage; amitriptyline is used when the side effect of mild sedation is desirable.

Nortriptyline is unique among the antidepressants in that its blood level exhibits the classical therapeutic window effect; blood concentrations above or below the therapeutic window correlate with poor clinical response. Thus, therapeutic monitoring to ensure that the blood level is within the therapeutic window is critical to accomplish successful treatment with this drug.

Like amitriptyline, nortriptyline can cause major cardiac toxicity when the concentration is above 500 ng/mL, characterized by QRS widening, which leads to ventricular tachycardia and asystole. In some patients, toxicity may manifest at lower concentrations.

Reference Values

Therapeutic concentration: 70-170 ng/mL

**Note:** Therapeutic ranges are for specimens drawn at trough (ie, immediately before next scheduled dose). Levels may be elevated in non-trough specimens.

Interpretation

Most individuals display optimal response to nortriptyline with serum levels of 70 to 170 ng/mL. Risk of toxicity is increased with nortriptyline levels above 500 ng/mL.

Some individuals may respond well outside of this range or may display toxicity within the therapeutic range; thus, interpretation should include clinical evaluation.

Therapeutic ranges are based on specimens collected at trough (ie, immediately before the next dose).

Cautions

This test cannot be performed on whole blood. Serum must be separated from cells within 2 hours of collection; if serum is not removed within this time, tricyclic antidepressant levels may be falsely elevated due to drug release from red blood cells.

Specimens that are obtained from gel tubes are not acceptable because the drug can absorb on the gel and lead to falsely decreased concentrations.

---

**Clinical Reference**

1. Wille SM, Cooreman SG, Neels HM, Lambert WE: Relevant issues in the monitoring and the toxicology of antidepressants. Crit Rev Clin Lab Sci. 2008;45(1):25-89
2. Thanacoody HK, Thomas SHL: Antidepressant poisoning. Clin Med (Lond). 2003 Mar-Apr;3(2):114-118
3. Hiemke C, Baumann P, Bergemann N, et al: AGNP Consensus Guidelines for Therapeutic Drug Monitoring in Psychiatry: Update 2011. Pharmacopsychiatry. 2011 Sep;44(6):195-235
4. Burtis CA, Ashwood ER, Bruns DE, eds. Tietz Textbook of Clinical Chemistry and Molecular Diagnostics. 5th ed. Elsevier; 2012

**Performance****Method Description**

The tricyclic antidepressants are extracted from serum using a solvent crash to precipitate proteins. The supernatant is removed and analysis is by liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry. (Unpublished Mayo method)

**PDF Report**

No

**Day(s) Performed**

Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday

**Report Available**

3 to 5 days

**Specimen Retention Time**

14 days

**Performing Laboratory Location**

Rochester

**Fees & Codes****Fees**

- Authorized users can sign in to [Test Prices](#) for detailed fee information.
- Clients without access to Test Prices can contact [Customer Service](#) 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Prospective clients should contact their account representative. For assistance, contact [Customer Service](#).

**Test Classification**

This test was developed and its performance characteristics determined by Mayo Clinic in a manner consistent with CLIA requirements. It has not been cleared or approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.

**CPT Code Information**

80299

LOINC® Information

Test ID	Test Order Name	Order LOINC® Value
NOTRP	Nortriptyline, S	3872-9

Result ID	Test Result Name	Result LOINC® Value
37119	Nortriptyline, S	3872-9