



**Cansford**  
**Laboratories**  
Pioneering drug and alcohol testing



**A GUIDE TO  
HAIR TESTING  
FOR DRUGS  
AND ALCOHOL**

# INTRODUCTION

Hair strand testing is one of the most **effective** and **least invasive methods** for identifying and confirming long-term **drug and alcohol use**.



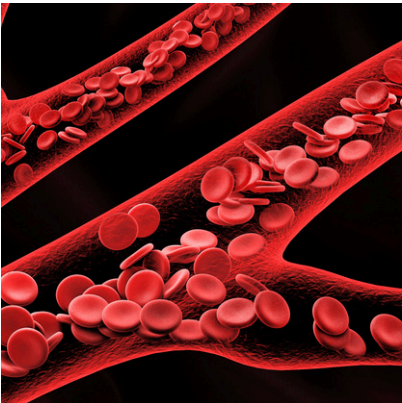
Hair testing offers a **clear, reliable** picture of drug or alcohol use over time, **detecting any substance from our ever-growing list**, including drugs of abuse, prescription medications, emerging compounds, and alcohol. When testing for drugs, it can provide insights into patterns of use over an **indefinite period**, while alcohol use can typically be detected for **up to six months**, depending on the length and type of hair sampled. The process requires only a small sample of hair, usually taken from the scalp or body. It's **quick, non-invasive, and highly accurate**.



# HOW HAIR TESTING WORKS



When a person uses drugs or alcohol, the substance enters the body where it's absorbed into the bloodstream.



The body breaks the substance down into metabolites. These are chemical markers left behind as the substance is processed.



As hair grows, these markers are deposited into the hair follicle.

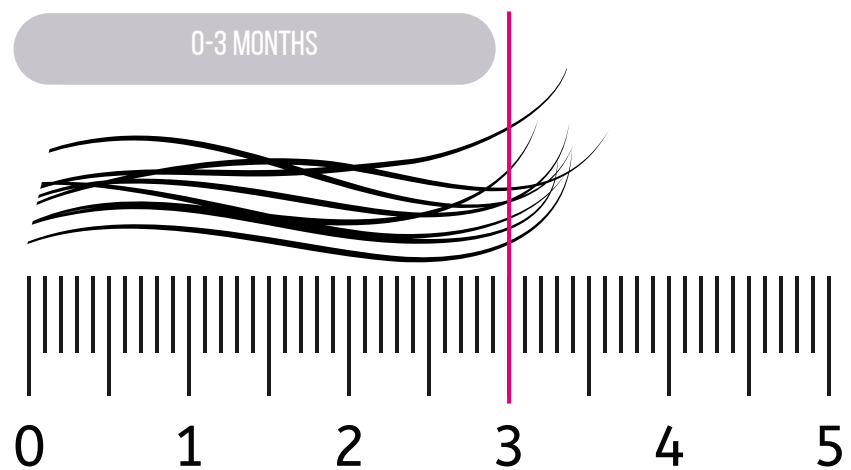


Once embedded, the metabolites stay in place, preserving the chemical record of substance use over weeks or months.

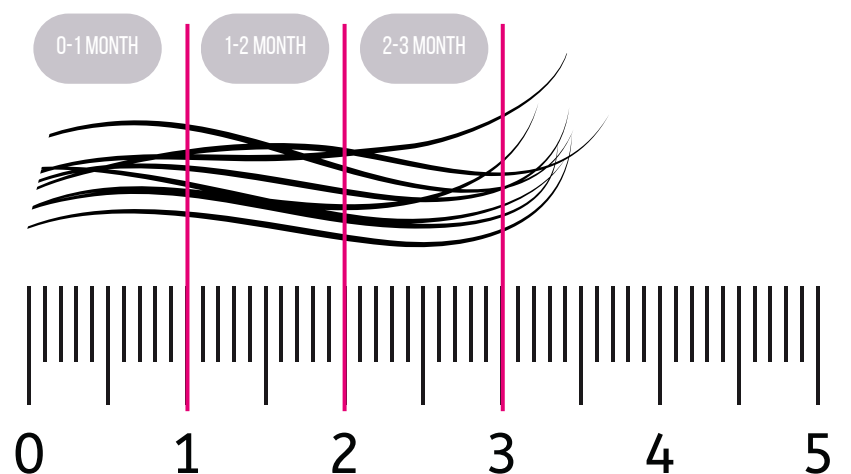
# OVERVIEW VS SECTIONAL

Although growth rates can vary, and we follow the Society of Hair Testing's guideline that **1cm of growth represents approximately one month**. This allows us to segment the hair and map out a timeline of use, giving a **month-by-month breakdown**. When scalp hair isn't available, body hair can be used instead, though it grows more slowly and unevenly, so the same length of body hair will cover a longer period.

An **overview analysis** gives a general picture of drug or alcohol use over a **broad period**, typically looking at the **entire sample or a larger portion of it**. The time frame depends on both the length and type of hair (head or body).



A **sectional analysis** (using **head hair only**) cuts the sample into **shorter segments** to provide a more **detailed** insight into what time period a person used drugs or alcohol. This allows for a **clearer, more specific** understanding of usage **patterns** over time.



# SCREENING VS CONFIRMATION ANALYSIS

Drug and alcohol testing methods vary widely, and some rely on basic **screening tests** that only detect the **parent drug group**. These tests typically provide a **yes or no** result without giving any specific details about the substances detected or their quantities. At Cansford, **we go a step further with confirmation analysis**; we test not just for the parent drugs, but also for their **metabolites**. This allows us to provide a **quantifiable result** for both the parent drugs and their metabolites, giving you a complete picture of the substances involved.

Metabolites are the **by-products** produced when the body metabolises a drug. Each parent drug group can **produce multiple metabolites**, depending on factors such as the form in which the drug was taken, and whether it was taken in combination with other substances, like alcohol.



Because of the way we test, we can confidently answer common questions regarding the use of medications by a sample donor. Our **precise method** ensures that **we only detect the substances we're testing for**, so medications that don't match these molecules **won't interfere** with our results.

# THE TIMELINE OF A SAMPLE



Hair samples are cut, washed and prepped for the lab. Each step is handled with precision to ensure the sample is ready for accurate and reliable analysis.

1



Each sample is taken with care, and securely packaged to maintain a clear chain of custody. Once it reaches us, every sample is logged, barcoded and tracked through each stage so no detail is missed.

2

3



Using our pioneering expertise, we then test the sample for the drugs requested from our ever growing substance list. We don't just say "yes or no", we provide quantifiable results that are admissible in court.

4



Every test comes with a Certificate of Analysis as standard. But when you need more detail, our scientists can provide a comprehensive expert report, all delivered within our 3 day turnaround time.

# EXPERT REPORTING

Clear and detailed, our expert reports are fully **court admissible**, providing everything you need to support your case.

Every test we conduct comes with a **certificate of analysis**, but when you need a more in-depth explanation, our qualified and court trained reporting scientists can provide a **comprehensive, written, expert report**. This includes a formal declaration of results, details on our reporting scientists' qualifications, and key information about the sample.

Following feedback from family law professionals, our expert reports were recently redesigned to meet the **highest standards of clarity and usability**.



# HAIR TESTING IN LAW: ADMISSIBILITY, COSTS, AND ACCURACY

## Admissibility of evidence

In public law cases, hair strand test results are admissible as evidence when the chain of custody is intact. Our witnessed, documented collection process and tamper-evident packs ensure this, allowing us to confirm the integrity of every sample.

In private law cases, where a test has been arranged independently, the results can only be used in court if permission is granted.



## Who pays for testing?

In public law proceedings, the cost of hair testing may be covered by legal aid – but only if the test is carried out under the court's instructions.

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is likely to withhold payment if conditions set by the court are not followed.

In private law cases, individuals are usually responsible for covering the cost themselves.

## Timelines in care proceedings

Care proceedings in public law must be concluded within six months, meaning evidence needs to be gathered quickly.

Hair strand testing can be completed within three working days of a sample reaching our lab.



## SOCIAL SERVICES CASE STUDY

Social services contacted us to conduct a hair strand test on a baby whose mother was suspected of heavy drug use. The concern was that the mother's drug use, particularly cocaine, could have been passed onto the child through breastfeeding.

To assess the situation, we performed hair strand testing on the baby to determine whether the child had been exposed to drugs over time. Additionally, we conducted an external contamination test to establish whether the child had been in direct contact with cocaine or if the exposure was only through ingestion via the mother's breast milk.

The wash analysis test came back negative, confirming that the baby had not been in direct contact with the drug. However, the hair strand analysis revealed the presence of cocaine, indicating that the drug had been ingested through the mother's milk. This crucial evidence helped clarify the source of the infant's drug exposure.

# INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY

A night out with friends took a serious turn when one individual attacked another, causing significant injuries. The attacker, who had no history of violence, claimed to have no memory of the incident and reported experiencing hallucinations. The victim also described the attack as completely out of character and did not wish to press charges. However, due to the severity of the injuries, the police were required to investigate, and the Crown Prosecution Service proceeded with charges. Given the attacker's claim of memory loss and hallucinations, they suspected they may have been spiked with drugs, which could have affected their behaviour.



Using sectional analysis, we segmented the hair down into smaller sections of 3mm, as opposed to our usual 1cm, to give an even more detailed breakdown of substances over a smaller time period. The results confirmed the presence of methamphetamine during the relevant period, supporting the claim that the attack was triggered by drug consumption rather than being a deliberate act of violence.



## FAMILY LAW CASE STUDY

Parents were suspected of drug use after concerns were raised about the safety and well-being of their child. The court ordered drug testing to assess the parents' substance use. Both parents denied regular drug use, claiming their substance use was infrequent and not impacting their ability to care for their child.

To provide clarity, the court required hair strand testing to offer a more accurate and long-term assessment of the parents' drug use. Hair strand testing is ideal in such cases, as it offers a comprehensive history of drug consumption over several months, rather than just a snapshot of recent use.

The test results revealed consistent drug use in both parents' hair samples, confirming the allegations of regular substance abuse. Multiple drugs were detected, providing clear evidence that their drug use had been ongoing over an extended period.

# WORKPLACE CASE STUDY

An employee was suspended from work after a routine workplace drug test returned a positive result for opiates. They had forgotten to disclose that they had recently taken co-codamol for back pain, leading to concerns that they may have been using other substances. While awaiting the outcome of an investigation, they were unable to work, placing them under significant stress.

To clarify the situation, their employer arranged for a hair strand drug test with us. Unlike basic drug screening, which simply detects the presence of a substance, our testing provides a full analysis, including the identification of specific metabolites that distinguish between prescribed medication and illicit drug use.



The results confirmed that the only opiate present was consistent with co-codamol, with no evidence of any other opiates in their system. This corroborated the employee's explanation, providing clear scientific evidence that they had not used any unauthorised substances. With this detailed analysis, the employer was able to confidently resolve the investigation, allowing the employee to return to work.

# ABOUT US

**Award-winning, pioneering** and **trusted**.

We offer accredited drug and alcohol testing that you can trust, at a speed others can't match.

Cansford can trace its roots back to 1993, when founders John Wicks and Lolita Tsanaclis developed the UK's first hair testing regime for drug and alcohol use. They pioneered the process which is now used common place across many industries and by many labs across the country.

From our bespoke, modern and bright laboratory in Cardiff, we offer a UK-wide testing service for individuals and organisations across family law, social care, education and the workplace – focused on exceptional care, quality, and upholding our record as the UK's fastest drug and alcohol-testing laboratory, with a three-working-day turnaround from sample receipt at the lab.





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**029 2150 8025**

**[cansfordlabs.co.uk](https://cansfordlabs.co.uk)**