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Exercise Stress Test

An exercise stress test is a screening tool used to test the effect of exercise on your heart.

How the test is performed

The technologist will place 10 flat, sticky patches called electrodes on your chest. These are attached to an ECG monitor that follows the electrical activity of your heart during the test.

You will walk on a treadmill. Slowly (usually every 3 minutes), you will be asked to walk faster and on an incline. It is like walking fast or jogging up a hill.

While you exercise, the activity of your heart is measured with an electrocardiogram (ECG), and your blood pressure readings are taken.

The test continues until:

- You reach a target heart rate
- You develop chest pain or a change in your blood pressure that is concerning
- ECG changes show that your heart muscle is not getting enough oxygen
- You are too tired or have other symptoms, such as leg pain, that keep you from continuing

You will be monitored for a few minutes after exercising. The total time of the test is around 30 minutes.

How to Prepare for the Test

You must not eat, smoke, or drink beverages containing caffeine or alcohol for 2 hours before the test.

Wear comfortable shoes (running or soft soled shoes) and loose (preferably two piece) clothing to allow you to exercise. As the electrodes are attached to your chest, you will be required to disrobe from the waist up. Gowns are supplied to allow you to cover up as much as possible.

Please bring a list of your current medications.



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How the Test Will Feel

Electrodes (conductive patches) will be placed on your chest to record the heart's activity. The preparation of the electrode sites on your chest may produce a mild burning or stinging sensation.

The blood pressure cuff on your arm will be inflated every few minutes, producing a squeezing sensation that may feel tight. Baseline measurements of heart rate and blood pressure will be taken before exercise starts.

You will start walking on a treadmill. The pace and incline of the treadmill will slowly be increased.

Sometimes, people experience some of the following during the test:

- Chest discomfort
- Dizziness
- Palpitations
- Shortness of breath

Why the Test is Performed

Reasons why an exercise stress test may be performed include:

- You are having chest pain (to check for coronary artery disease -- narrowing of the arteries that feed the heart muscle)
- Your angina is becoming more severe or is happening more often
- You have had a heart attack
- You have had angioplasty or heart bypass surgery
- You are going to start an exercise program and you have heart disease or certain risk factors, such as diabetes
- To identify heart rhythm changes that may occur during exercise
- To further test for a heart valve problem (such as aortic valve or mitral valve stenosis)

There may be other reasons why your health care provider asks for this test.