



What Is a Stress Test?

A stress test, or exercise stress test, helps your health care team find out how well your heart works when it's pumping hard and fast. As your body works harder during the test, it requires more fuel, and your heart has to pump more blood. The test can show if there's a lack of blood supply to the heart.

Taking a stress test also helps your health care professional know what kind and level of physical activity is right for you.

The results of your stress test may help your health care professional decide if you have heart disease, and, if so, how severe it is.



Why do people need stress tests?

Exercise stress tests can be used to find:

- If you have an irregular heartbeat
- If your symptoms, such as chest pain or difficulty breathing, are related to your heart
- How hard you should exercise when you join a cardiac rehabilitation program or start an exercise program
- If the treatments you received for heart disease are working
- If you need other tests, such as a coronary angiogram, to find narrowed arteries
- If you are at increased risk of having a heart attack

How do I prepare for a stress test?

- Tell your health care team about any medications you take, including over-the-counter medications, herbs and vitamins. They may ask you not to take them before the test. Do not stop taking medications unless asked to do so.
- You may be asked not to eat, drink or smoke for two to four hours before the test. You may drink water.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing and jogging or tennis shoes.

What equipment is commonly used?

Wires, or electrodes, will be attached to your chest and arms or shoulders. The wires are connected to an electrocardiography (EKG) machine. The machine will record your heartbeat and heart waves in an electrocardiogram.

You'll also have a cuff on your arm to check your blood pressure.

What is monitored during the test?

- Your heart rate
- Your breathing
- Your blood pressure
- Your heart's electrical activity
- How tired you feel

What happens during the test?

If it's not safe for you to exercise, your health care professional will give you medication to make your heart work harder, as though you were exercising. They will then monitor how your heart works when it's beating faster.

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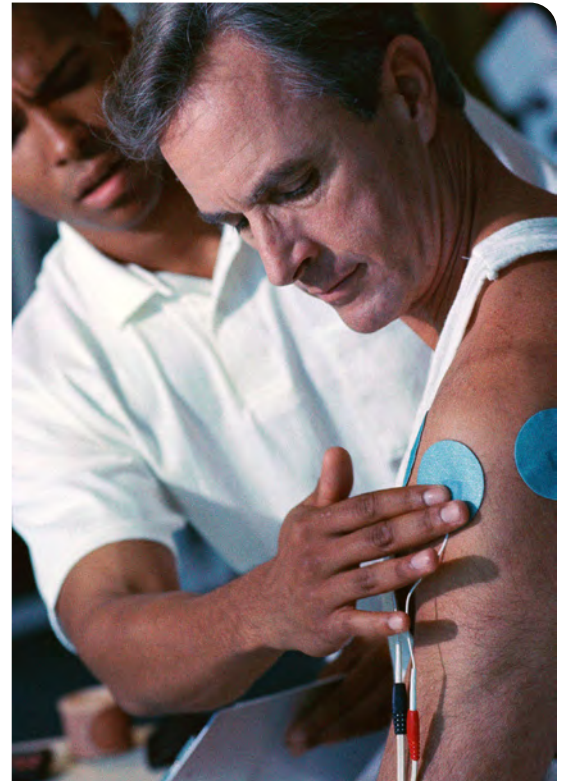
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If you can exercise, during the test:

- You'll be hooked up to equipment to monitor your heart.
- You'll exercise on a treadmill or stationary bicycle.
 - On a treadmill, the speed increases so that you walk faster. It also tilts so you feel as if you're going uphill.
 - On a stationary bicycle, the resistance is slowly increased so it becomes harder to pedal.
 - You'll exercise for about 10-15 minutes.
- You can stop the test at any time if you need to.
- After the test, you'll sit or lie down, and your heart rate and blood pressure will be checked.

Are there any risks?

- There's very little risk with a stress test.
- You will be monitored throughout the test in case anything unusual happens.



Wires, or electrodes, will be hooked up to your chest and arms or shoulders. The wires are connected to the EKG machine.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at SupportNetwork.heart.org.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

Could a stress test give me a heart attack?

Will I need more tests?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk of heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.