

CARDIAC STRESS TEST (EXERCISE STRESS TEST-GXT)

OVERVIEW

A stress test can detect issues with oxygen supply to your heart muscle. A doctor or trained nurse performs the test. They'll learn how much your heart can manage before an abnormal rhythm starts or blood flow to your heart muscle drops.

Your doctor may recommend a stress test to:

- Assess symptoms, such as chest pain, shortness of breath or palpitations
- Determine if enough blood flows to your heart during physical activity
- Learn how your heart medications are working
- Check for signs of coronary heart disease
- Identify abnormal heart rhythms
- Help you develop a safe exercise program
- Assess exercise ability before heart valve surgery

PREPARING FOR YOUR TEST

Getting ready for a stress test is relatively easy. Just keep these simple tips in mind before your appointment:

- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes for the test
- Avoid lotions and body oils on day of test
- Don't eat or drink anything except water for two hours before the test
- Don't drink or eat anything with caffeine for 24 hours before the test
- Bring your inhaler, if needed

You may also be asked to stop taking medications, such as beta blockers on the day of your test or 24 hours prior to the test, as these medications tend to keep one's heart rate low. If you have questions about your medicines, ask your doctor. Don't discontinue any drug without checking with you doctor first.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING YOUR STRESS TEST

First, a nurse or a technician will gently clean several small areas on your chest and apply small, flat, sticky patches called electrodes. You'll be connected to a monitor that charts your heart's electrical activity during the test.

Before you start exercising, the nurse or technician will perform an EKG to measure your heart rate at rest. They'll also take your blood pressure. You will begin to exercise by walking on a treadmill. The rate of exercise or degree of difficulty will gradually increase. You will be asked to exercise until you feel exhausted.

At regular intervals, the lab personnel will ask how you are feeling. Tell them if you feel:

- Chest and/or arm discomfort
- Short of breath
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Any unusual symptoms

Remember, it's normal for your heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate and perspiration to increase during the test.

Your progress and body's response will be closely monitored by your health care team in the room.

That typically includes:

- **Registered Nurse** – Your nurse administers any necessary medication and monitors your vital signs and heart.
- **Cardiac Tech** (if at the hospital)– The tech will help prepare you for the test by attaching electrodes to your skin. They will also monitor your blood pressure throughout the stress test.
- **Supervising Physician**- A cardiologist is always on-site if needed for questions or emergencies.

AFTER YOUR TEST

Although the appointment lasts about 60 minutes, the exercise time is usually between seven to twelve minutes. When the exercise is completed, you'll rest while your heart rate and breathing are monitored. You may go home once you have recovered. Your doctor will be notified about your results and let you know if you need treatment or further testing.