

Exercise Stress Test

What to expect

This handout is a guide to exercise tolerance tests, treadmill stress echocardiograms, and bicycle stress echocardiograms. It explains what an exercise stress test is and what to expect when you have one.



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What is an exercise stress test?

An exercise stress test shows how well your heart works during exercise. Based on your medical history and symptoms, your health care provider has ordered one of these three tests:

- Exercise tolerance test
- Treadmill stress echocardiogram
- Bicycle stress echocardiogram
 - This test is only ordered for specific clinical *indications* (the reason you are being seen). Your health care provider will determine which type of test you need.

Depending on the type of test your provider ordered, you will exercise either by walking on a treadmill or by pedaling a *supine* (lying down) stationary bicycle. The test might also include taking ultrasound images of your heart before and after your exercise.

Why did my care team order this test?

Your care team may have ordered this test to:

- figure out if your heart is the cause of your recent symptoms
- help your care team manage your heart symptoms and medications
- test how well your heart handles exercise

What are the risks?

An exercise stress test has very little risk. Exercise may cause you to experience your recent symptoms or change your heart rhythm. The risk of serious injury or death is 1 in 10,000 patients.

What will happen during the test?

Before your test, you will talk with the clinic staff about your health history and any symptoms you have been experiencing. It is important to tell the staff about any symptoms you experience before, during, and/or after this test.

We will place *electrocardiogram* (ECG) leads on your chest with small sticky pads. ECG leads are sensors used to monitor your heart rhythm and activity. We will also place a blood pressure cuff on your arm to monitor your blood pressure during the test.

If your test includes ultrasound images of the heart, these images may be taken before, during, and/or immediately after exercise. The staff at your clinic may use an *intravenous* (IV) medication to help see your heart better.

The treadmill will increase in speed and/or angle every 3 minutes. The bicycle will increase in resistance (difficulty) every 3 minutes. During the test, you may start to feel very tired or have other symptoms that will make you want to stop the test.

Who can stop the test?

You may stop the test at any time if your symptoms become severe or uncomfortable. Patients sometimes choose to stop a test due to:

- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness
- Dizziness

The clinic staff may stop the test if they are concerned about your well-being and safety. The staff may stop your test if you have:

- Abnormal heart rhythm
- Abnormal blood pressure
- Risks to your physical safety
- Too much discomfort

How do I get the test results?

After your test is completed, a cardiologist (heart specialist) will review and interpret your results. They will share your final test results with the healthcare provider who ordered this test for you. Your healthcare provider may talk with you about your test results, or the results may be available on MyChart for you to view.

Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have any questions or concerns please contact your care team or speak with the clinic staff during your exercise test.