EXERCISE STRESS TEST

Tracking Your Heart’s Response to Exercise
What Is an Exercise Stress Test?

An exercise stress test is also called a stress electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG). It records your heartbeat while you walk on a treadmill or ride a stationary bike. This test helps your doctor evaluate the cause of chest pain. It also measures the strength of your heart after a heart attack or surgery. Don’t worry about having to exercise. The stress test measures your heart, not your athletic ability. It is done in hospitals, test centers, and doctors’ offices.

An ECG showing a heart at rest.

An ECG showing a heart beating faster during exercise.
Before Your Test
When you schedule the test, be sure to mention what medicines you take. Ask if you should take any before the test. Don’t eat, drink, smoke, or have any caffeine for 3 hours before your test. Sips of water are okay. Make sure you wear walking shoes and a 2-piece outfit. You may need to undress from the waist up and put on a short hospital gown. Although you don’t have to exercise for long, the entire test takes about 30 minutes. Also, allow extra time to check in.

Don’t eat, drink, smoke, or have any caffeine for 3 hours before the test. Coffee, tea, chocolate, cola drinks, and some over-the-counter pain relievers may contain caffeine. If you are diabetic, ask what you may eat before the test.
During Your Test

- Small pads (electrodes) are placed on your upper body to monitor your heart rate.
- Then you are shown how to use the treadmill or bike. You need to exercise for several minutes.
- The exercise is very easy at first. Then it slowly gets harder.
- You should exercise for as long as possible.
- Your heartbeat and blood pressure are monitored during and after the test.
After Your Test
As soon as the test is over, you may eat and return to your normal routine. Ask your doctor about taking any medicine that you were told to skip before the test.

Report Any Symptoms
Be sure to tell the doctor if you feel any of the following during the test:
- Chest, arm, or jaw discomfort
- Severe shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Leg cramps or soreness

You may return to your normal activities after the test.
Your Test Results

Your doctor will discuss your test results with you during a future office visit. The test results help the doctor plan your treatment and any other tests that are needed.