



## 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 are used to find out:

- 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 treatments you have received for heart disease are working.
- If you need other tests, such as a coronary angiogram, to detect narrowed arteries.
- If you are at risk of having a heart attack.

### How do I prepare for a stress test?

- Tell your health care team about any medicines you take, including over-the-counter medicines, herbs and vitamins. They may ask you not to take them before the test. Do not stop taking medicines 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 used?

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

Near the end of the test, you might have to breathe into a mouthpiece that will measure the air you breathe out.

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

If you're not able to exercise, you'll get medicine through an intravenous (IV) line in your arm.

### What is monitored during the test?

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

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### What happens during the test?

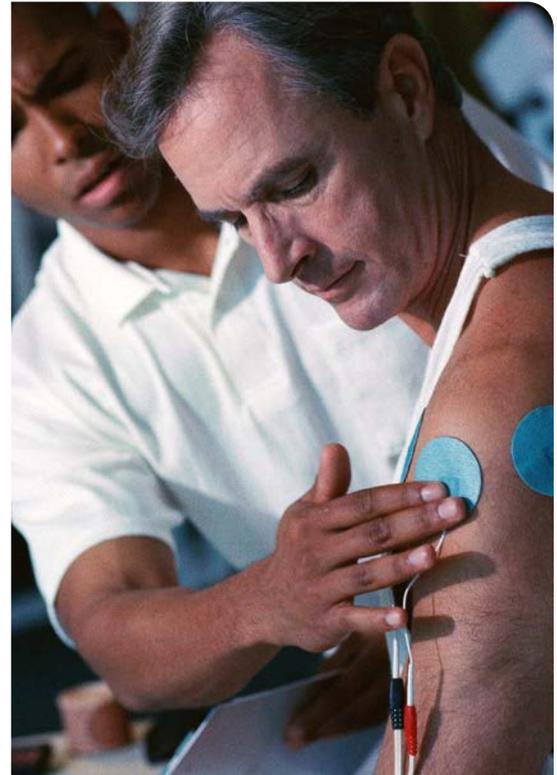
If it's not safe for you to exercise, your health care professional will give you medicine to make your heart work harder, as though you were exercising. They will then monitor how your heart works when it's beating faster.

If you are able to 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 you walk faster. It also tilts so you feel like you're going uphill.
  - On a stationary bicycle, the resistance is slowly increased so it becomes harder to pedal.
  - You'll exercise for 10-15 minutes.
- You may be asked to breathe into a tube for a couple of minutes.
- You can stop the test at any time if you need to.
- After slowing your heart rate down for a few minutes, 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.
- Health care professionals will monitor you 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 ECG machine.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [heart.org](https://www.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](https://www.heartinsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](https://www.heart.org/SupportNetwork).

### 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 for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](https://www.heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.