

Exercise Stress Test

An exercise stress test is a tool your physician may use to assess your heart health. The test can reveal if there is reduced blood flow in the arteries that supply the heart, often a sign of blockage. During exercise, healthy coronary arteries dilate more than those with blockage. Narrowed arteries provide less blood (and less oxygen) to certain areas of the heart. The lack of oxygen can cause symptoms such as chest pain or inappropriate shortness of breath. An EKG done during the stress test may show abnormalities that help the physician determine where the blocked arteries are.

Who Might Have a Stress Test

Having symptoms of coronary artery diseases , or having significant risk factors for CAD are the main reasons your doctor may recommend a stress test. It may also be given if you complain of unusual fatigue, shortness of breath or irregular heart beat during exercise.

What to Expect

Typically, your resting heart rate and blood pressure are recorded, and twelve adhesive electrodes are attached to your torso. You will also have a Blood Pressure cuff on your arm. You start walking on the treadmill at a very slow speed. Over minutes, the speed and elevation is increased. The test is generally stopped when you reach your target heart rate, but this is up to your physician.

Results

A stress test can generally diagnose disease in approximately two thirds of those with coronary artery disease. The accuracy is lower (about 50%) when patients have narrowing in a single coronary artery or higher (greater than 80%) when all three major arteries are involved. Approximately 10% of patients may have a "false-positive" test (when the result is falsely abnormal in a patient without coronary artery disease). You should receive initial results at the end of your test. However, the official result may take a few days to complete. The results of the test may help confirm or rule out a diagnosis of heart disease. If you have a history of coronary artery disease the study will help confirm that you are stable or that a new blockage is developing. The results may cause your doctor to modify your treatment or have additional testing preformed (cardiac catheterization, Echo Stress test, or a nuclear stress test).

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