

What is a Stress Echocardiogram?

A Stress Echocardiogram is a specialised test that is used to evaluate heart function by combining an exercise test with an ultrasound of the heart (Echocardiogram). A Stress Echocardiogram uses ultrasound waves to produce images of the heart before and immediately following exercise. The images obtained at rest are then compared with the images obtained after exercise to evaluate how the heart responds to exercise.

Your doctor uses the Stress Echocardiogram to:

- Evaluate causes for chest pains and shortness of breath
- Evaluate effectiveness of stents/bypass surgery
- Determine how well your heart tolerates activity
- Evaluate the function of the heart and valves
- Determine the likelihood of having coronary artery disease (blocked arteries)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your cardiac treatment plan

How is the Stress Echocardiogram done?

- Before the test, a cardiac technician will explain the test to you and is available to answer any questions or concerns that you may have.
- Ladies will be requested to change into a gown as we require a bare chest for this procedure.
- Your skin will then be prepared for the Electrocardiography (ECG) by gently rubbing small areas of your chest with rough paper and alcohol. This removes dead skin cells. Men with hairy chests may need to have these areas shaved. Electrode patches are then applied to the chest and attached to the ECG monitor.
- You will then be asked to lie on your left side so that the Sonographer can begin imaging your heart using ultrasound (Echocardiography). The Sonographer will place a transducer on several areas of your chest. The transducer will have a small amount of cool gel on the end, which will not harm your skin.
- The Sonographer may ask you to alter your breathing at times throughout the echocardiogram. It is important that you follow these instructions, so that it is possible to obtain the most accurate images.
- You are then required to walk on a treadmill, whereby the grade and speed will increase every 3 minutes. This will make you feel like you are walking up a hill. You should exercise for as long as possible so as to ensure an accurate test.
- Your ECG and blood pressure will be closely monitored during the test, however if you experience chest, arm, jaw pain or discomfort, shortness of breath, dizziness, light-headedness, irregular heart beats or the test is particularly uncomfortable for you, let the technician know immediately.
- After you have finished exercising, you will quickly lie back on the bed and the Sonographer will take some more images of your heart while your heart rate is increased. You will again be asked to alter your breathing, by holding your breath briefly either in or out so the images can be recorded. It is very important that you follow these instructions as these images need to be obtained very quickly (approximately 90 seconds).
- The test will take approximately 45 minutes.

How do I prepare for the test?

- *You will need to fast for 1 hour prior to your appointment time.* You may drink small amounts of water. If you are a diabetic, you may eat as required.
- Wear comfortable clothing (preferably a 2 piece outfit) and footwear as you will be walking on a treadmill. Ladies will be provided with a gown.
- Take all your medications as prescribed, unless otherwise instructed by your doctor.
- Please bring a list of all your medications with you.

When will I receive my results?

A Cardiologist will be in attendance during the test and will compare the images of your heart at rest with the images of your heart after exercise. He will then advise you of the results. A written report of the results of your test will be sent to your referring doctor for discussion. *If you will be seeing your doctor within 24 hours of having the test, please advise reception staff and the Sonographer or Technician.*

What do I need to bring to my appointment?

- Your **referral** from your GP or referring specialist (if it is not already held by us).
- A list of your current medications and dosages
- Any previous x-rays or test results relating to your current condition