

Patient Information Sheet

Stress Echocardiogram

A Stress Echocardiogram is a test to assess heart function under physical stress. It uses ultrasound waves to image the heart and assess its function before and immediately after the exercise to see how the heart muscle pump is working, and sometimes to measure other parameters.

This test is done to see if there is reduced blood supply to any portion of the heart which may mean that there may be a narrowing/ blockage in one of the coronary arteries supplying blood to that part of the heart muscle.

There are also other reasons where your doctor may request Stress Echo – for example to assess valve function under stress, measure pressure changes in the heart during stress and sometimes for licensing and other purposes.

How to Prepare

- Please bring your referral (if you were given one) to the test and give it to a staff member.
- Adequate footwear for walking quickly on a treadmill
- Ideally wear shorts / exercise pants from the waist down.
- Be aware we will need access to your chest to perform the ECG component and to take the ultrasound pictures of the heart.
- Please do not apply any creams/moisturisers to the chest prior to the test.

How Long Does It Take?

Anticipate a total of approximately 45 minutes including preparation time, the test itself and a follow up discussion afterwards about the result. The treadmill/exercise component usually only takes up to approximately 8 minutes.

Why Do We Do It?

The test is often utilised to assess for the cause of symptoms like chest pain, breathlessness and dizzy spells. The primary focus is to assess for severe heart (coronary) artery narrowing's not by seeing them directly but by assessing the different areas of the heart muscle's response to exercise. All areas of the heart muscle should increase their pumping function and if they don't – this may suggest a severe narrowing in the heart artery supplying that particular section of the heart muscle. Besides the heart pumping function, stress echo can also assess for the heart valvular function as well as the pressures in the heart before and after exercise.

Potential Complications

The test itself carries no risk more than pushing yourself physically at home. The quoted rate of a major complication, including heart attack, is 1 in 10,000.

After the test you can go home and resume normal activities. It is important to follow-up with your doctor will review the results and discuss next steps.