

Stress Echocardiography

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What is it?

A stress echo is used to evaluate the function of the heart under conditions of stress to identify problems with the blood supply of the heart as occurs with narrowed arteries. Initially an Echocardiogram is performed to assess the heart function at rest. Then a treadmill stress test is performed to place the heart under stress. Immediately after the completion of this test a further Echocardiogram is performed to assess the function of the heart under stress conditions. This will identify areas that work poorly indicating inadequate blood flow and possible blockages of the coronary arteries. The test is painless.

Now long does it take?

The initial echo takes about 10 minutes followed by a 10 minute stress test and further 10 minute echo lasting in total about 45 - 60 minutes. The stress test is supervised by a Cardiologist and interpreted by Dr James Wong who is an expert in the field. We have a brand new Hewlett Packard dedicated cardiac echo machine for this test guaranteeing you a test of the highest quality. If for any reason you are not able to exercise on a treadmill eg. Severe joint problems etc. you should inform us as soon as possible so that an alternative form of stress testing can be arranged.

What preparation do I need?

You should not eat for at least 4 hours before the test.

Men should wear comfortable loose clothes such as tracksuit pants or shorts and comfortable shoes such as runners. Chest hair is shaved to allow the sticky electrode to adhere to the skin.

Ladies should wear skirts or pants to allow the chest to be separately exposed for electrode placement. A loose fitting gown will be provided. Comfortable flat shoes are preferable.

Medications: Check with your Doctor. We usually stop beta blockers (Tenormin, Betaloc, Noten, Lopressor, Visken, Inderal, Atenolol) and Calcium blockers (Isoptin, Cordilox, Veracaps, Cardizem) for 24-48 hours before the test.

What are the risks?

Adding echo to a treadmill stress test improves the accuracy to between 80 and 90%. In occasional patients these tests may still fail to detect heart problems that are present. Thus, if your chest pain persists despite a satisfactory exercise test you should notify your Doctor who may then order more extensive testing. The risk of a stress tests is low but rarely, patients with severe heart disease can suffer heart attacks or cardiac arrhythmias. **You should notify us if your chest pains have been worsening or become more frequent in the days leading up to the test.** At John Fawkner Cardiology we have full facilities to deal with cardiac emergencies and the backup of the hospital and Coronary Care Unit if required.