

## **Stress Echocardiogram**

### **What is a stress echo?**

This test combines an ultrasound of your heart and a stress test.

### **Why is a stress echo performed?**

The purpose of the test is to compare the images of the heart muscle before and after it is stressed. In a healthy heart, all areas of the heart pump harder during exercise. Abnormal movement of the heart may mean that there is a blockage in the coronary artery that supplies blood to that area. Abnormal heart wall motion may be seen at rest if there was a previous heart attack. If an artery is only partially blocked, and there has not been any heart damage, the motion of the heart is usually normal at rest, but may be temporarily abnormal during or immediately after exercise.

### **How do I prepare for a stress echo?**

No eating, drinking, or smoking 4 hours prior to the test.

No caffeine 24 hours prior to the test.

Ask your doctor if it's safe for you to continue taking all of your prescription and over-the-counter medications before the test, because they might interfere with certain stress tests.

If you use an inhaler for asthma or other breathing problems, bring it to the test. Make sure your doctor and the health care team member monitoring your stress test know that you use an inhaler.

Wear or bring comfortable clothes and walking shoes.

Wear comfortable clothing. You will be asked to remove clothing from the waist up and will be provided with a gown.

Don't apply oil, lotion or cream to your skin on the day of your nuclear stress test.

### **What happens during a stress echo?**

The procedure will be explained to you in detail by the cardiac sonographer in a private room.

A stress echo is performed by walking on a treadmill.

The nurse will listen to your heart and lungs prior to testing as well as check your blood pressure and heart rate.

You will be asked to remove any top garments, with the exception of a bra, to place the electrodes on the necessary chest areas.

Sticky electrode patches are placed on your chest to detect your heart's rhythm, so the nurse can monitor your heart's electrical activity during stress. Some areas may need to be shaved to help them stick and decrease artifact interference during testing.

After confirming connectivity, your shirt can be put back on.

Your heart beat, blood pressure, and exertion level will be monitored periodically during and after the stress echo.

You will start by walking on a stationary treadmill and it will increase in speed and incline every 3 minutes until your minimum target heart rate is reached or you develop symptoms that don't allow you to continue. You can use the railing on the treadmill for balance. Once the minimum target heart rate is reached you will continue to exercise until you fatigue or reach your maximum range of your heart rate.

Immediately after the treadmill comes to a stop you will be asked to lie on your left side on the exam table in order to obtain the pictures of your heart while the heart rate is elevated and still under stress.

The sonographer will place an ultrasound transducer on several areas of your chest with a small amount of gel that helps produce clearer pictures. You should not feel any major discomfort, just a slight pressure from the ultrasound transducer on different areas of the chest.

You will be monitored during the recovery period for approximately 5 minutes or until you return to baseline.

### **How long does a stress echo take?**

The appointment will take about 60-90 minutes.

### **How will my results be communicated?**

After the cardiologist has reviewed and interpreted your images, a report will be sent to the ordering physician. Your physician will explain the meaning of your test results with you and next steps for your treatment and care plan. A referral to a Cardiologist may be necessary.

### **How can I get a copy of my results?**

Imaging reports can be made available for you to keep or share with other physicians. Please allow 24 hours for record requests. Contact the Cardiology department for all cardiac record requests 540-368-5384. Records can be picked up at the Cardiology department.