



Having an exercise stress echocardiogram: angina

Your doctor has referred you for an exercise stress echocardiogram. This leaflet explains what it does and how it is carried out.

Important preparations before the test

- You **MUST NOT TAKE beta-blockers or certain calcium-channel blockers for 48 hours before the test.** These tablets prevent the heart from working harder. If you do continue with beta-blocker or certain calcium-channel blocker drugs, the stress echo may need to be postponed.

Beta-blockers that need to be stopped include:

- **Atenolol, Bisoprolol, Carvedilol, Metoprolol, Sotalol, or Propranolol**, although there are others. Please double-check on the package.

Calcium-channel blockers that need to be stopped include:

- **Diltiazem and Verapamil.** Please double-check on the package.
- Nevertheless medication with a slightly different type of calcium-channel blocker like **Amlodipine, Nifedipine or Lercanidipine must be continued** as they have no effect on the heart rate and help control the blood pressure during the stress test.
- Apart from beta-blockers and certain Calcium –channel blockers you **MUST CONTINUE all other medication**, in particular your blood pressure medication. These tablets control the blood pressure and we might have to stop the scan prematurely if your blood pressure rises too high during the test.
You should avoid heavy meals, smoking and caffeine for two hours before the test.
- Please bring a list of your current medication with you to your appointment.

If you have any doubts, please contact this unit.

What is a stress echo?

An echocardiogram or ‘echo’ is a scan that uses ultrasound (sound waves) to produce pictures of the heart. The test is painless and does not use radioactivity.

During an exercise echo, your doctor will ask you to ride an exercise bike while pictures of your heart are taken.

Why is it being done?

An exercise echo is performed as it allows your doctor to understand how the heart copes when it is made to work harder.

An exercise echo is useful to diagnose whether you have angina or not. It can also give your doctor information about the severity of a heart valve problem.

What does it involve?

- You will be taken into a darkened room. Two people will usually be present when you have the test – an echocardiographer and an assistant.
- You will be asked to undress to the waist and put on a gown that should be left open to the front. You will be asked to sit on an exercise bicycle which can also be reclined and tilted sideways for the best positioning.
- Stickers will be attached to your chest and connected to the ECG and echo machine. These will be used to monitor your heart trace. Your blood pressure will also be checked regularly throughout the test. A drip may be placed in the vein in your arm, if contrast (dye) needs to be injected to improve the quality of the images recorded.
- Pictures of your heart will be recorded on the machine. You will then be asked to exercise on the exercise bike. The exercise will be gentle at first but will get progressively more strenuous. We will record pictures of your heart whilst you are exercising.
- When you have performed enough exercise, or if you are unable to continue, more images of the heart will be recorded. You will continue to have your heart rate and blood pressure monitored until you have fully recovered, which may take several minutes.
- Overall the exercise echo will take around 30-45 minutes to complete.

At the end of the procedure

You will be able to return home after the test has been completed, and can resume day-to-day activities as usual.

Are there any risks in having the exercise echo?

- This is a safe test and similar to exercising in everyday life but under controlled conditions.
- There is an extremely small risk (less than 1 in 10,000) of developing an allergic reaction if contrast is used. **If you have had allergic reactions to any medicines before please inform us before starting the test.**
- If you suffer with angina, there is an extremely small risk (less than 1 in 10,000) that you may have a small heart attack during the test.

Where will the test take place?

You will need to attend the Cardiology Department, Level 1 Battle Block at the date and time stated in your letter. **Please arrive 15 minutes before your stated appointment time.**

If you have any queries please contact the department on 0118 322 6515.

Useful contacts

Cardiac Reception Enquiries 0118 322 6515
Clinical Admin Team (CAT 11) (bookings): 0118 322 6676 (Mon - Fri, 8am - 5pm)
British Heart Foundation: www.bhf.org.uk

This leaflet is printed privately for the Cardiac Fund. It was set up in 1976 for the purpose of providing cardiac services that would otherwise not be available through National Health resources. Our Cardiac Laboratory was largely equipped through the fund and many other areas in the Department have also benefited from equipment and staff training.



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Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Reviewed by Dr K Balkhausen, RBFT Cardiology April 2024.

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