

Stress Echocardiogram - Patient Information

What is it?

Echocardiography assesses the likelihood that you have significant narrowings in your heart arteries. By comparing your heart function before and after exercise using echocardiography your Cardiologist can infer whether enough blood is getting to your heart, or if a narrowing is restricting the supply. Usually, we stress your heart with exercise, however for patients who are unable to exercise a drug called dobutamine is used instead. This drug is infused through a vein in your arm. This variant of stress echocardiography is called 'Dobutamine Stress Echocardiography'.



For bookings, call (07) 3858 8690

What should I expect?

Preparation

- Specific heart medicines may need to be stopped 1 or 2 days prior to the test. Such instructions are generally provided when the test is scheduled.
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes that are suitable for exercise.
- An explanation of the test is provided and you will be asked to sign a consent form.

How long does the entire test take?

You should allow 1 hour for the entire test, including the preparation, echo imaging, and stress test.

What should I expect?

At the beginning of the test, your heart will be imaged using ultrasound (called echocardiography). The technician will put a thick gel on your chest, which may feel cold but it will not harm your skin. Then, the technician will use the transducer to send and receive sound waves. These sound waves are not audible. The transducer will be placed directly on the left side of your chest, over your heart. The technician will press firmly as he or she moves the transducer across your chest and you will be asked to briefly hold your breath at times during the test.

If you are having an exercise stress echocardiogram, you will walk on a treadmill and the grade and speed will increase every 3 minutes to make you feel like you are walking uphill.

This increasing workload on the heart ensures the test is as accurate as possible.

You should exercise for as long as possible to ensure your test is as accurate as possible.

After you have finished exercising, you will lie down on an examination bed and the technician will take more echocardiography pictures. You will be asked to breathe out and hold your breath briefly several times so the images can be recorded. It is very important that you do your best to hold your breathe during this part of the examination because the technician has only 1-2 minutes to obtain these images before your heart slows down to a normal rate.

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If you are having the dobutamine stress echo test then you will be required to lie down on the bed throughout the examination. As the dose of dobutamine is increased, your heart will pump harder and faster and the technician will take pictures of your heart with the echo machine throughout.

You may experience some side effects from this drug including headache, flushing or a thumping heart. None of these are dangerous side effects. Most stress echo tests take about 45 minutes.

The results will be sent to your doctor generally on the same day.

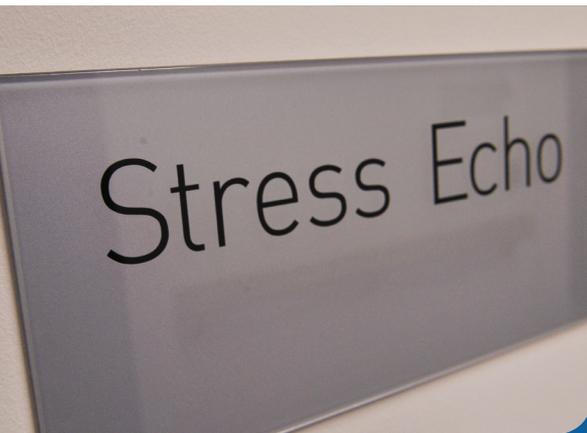
How safe is a Stress Echo test?

Complications are rare during both exercise and dobutamine stress echocardiography. Heart attack or abnormal heart rhythms may occur rarely. The risk of death is about 1 in 10,000.

There are no known adverse effects from the ultrasound used during Echo imaging. The risk of the stress portion of the test is rare and similar to what you would expect from any strenuous form of exercise (jogging in your neighbourhood, running up a flight of stairs, etc.). As noted earlier, experienced medical staff are in attendance to manage the rare complications like sustained abnormal heart rhythm, unrelieved chest pain or even a heart attack. These problems could potentially have occurred if the same patient performed an equivalent level of exercise at home or while jogging.

Results:

After the completion of your stress echocardiogram, one of our cardiologists will discuss your results with you. An official report will be sent to your referring doctor.



Important information

If a patient is able to achieve the target heart rate and if the ECHO images are of good technical quality, a Stress Echo is capable of diagnosing important disease in more than 85% of patients with coronary artery disease.

It can also exclude important disease in more than 90% of cases when the test is absolutely normal.