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What to expect during a stress test?

Why is stress test recommended, what's the cost and everything else you need to know!

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If you have ever been to a doctor with a complaint of chest pain or if your doctor suspects a heart disease, you might be recommended an ECG. If your ECG report indicates an abnormality in the heart rate, then to confirm the diagnosis, your doctor might recommend a series of tests. One of the diagnostic tests that are recommended to detect the heart function is a stress test. So if your doctor has recommended one and you are wondering what it means, then here is what you can expect during the test. **Dr Santosh Kumar Dora, Cardiac Electro Physiologist, Asian Heart Institute, Mumbai** explains everything in detail about the stress test.

What is a stress test?

It is a diagnostic test that can be done by with the help of a treadmill, bicycle or simply by lying on a bed. In this, you are made to increase the pressure on the heart to know how well the organ is tolerating the pressure and if there's any abnormality. Also read about [B tests](#) that can tell if you have heart disease.

How is it done?

For stress test on a treadmill, you are made to walk at a certain speed (which is increased slowly) with electrodes placed over the upper body to detect signals. For the bicycle one, there is no need to walk but a static movement is required. So you have to sit on the bicycle and start peddling inducing a static walk. In the last type, a patient is asked to lie down on a bed and given drugs that increase the heart rate to detect any abnormalities.

Who is advised stress test?

Patients who complain of a chest pain when walking or while resting or experiences discomfort in the chest, which is a signal of heart blockage is recommended a stress test. Patients who are at high risk of developing heart blockages such as those suffering from diabetes or hypertension or are above 40 years of age are advised stress test. Hence, the heart under stress to see if ECG is normal or not. Read to know [why is an ECG required?](#)

How does stress test help?

If a patient has a heart blockage, it is a sign of ischemic heart disease. In this, the blood flow is abnormal which leads to an increased heart rate increase. Hence, undergoing the stress test, helps you to detect the risk of ischemic heart disease or heart blockage.

What to do if the stress test is positive?

If the stress test is positive, then you might need to undergo an angiogram. And depending upon the results, percent of blockage, your doctor will decide the treatment option. It can either be treated with medications or you might be advised to undergo angioplasty or bypass surgery, whichever option suits you. Read more on [heart disease — types, causes, diagnosis, treatment and prevention](#)

Do I need to fast?

It is advised to fast for at least 2 hours before the stress test. This is because, after having food, most people do not feel like walking immediately. Also, exercising immediately after a meal is not recommended.

Who cannot undergo the test?

If you are taking any medications that decrease the heart rate that you need to talk to your doctor. As our aim is to increase the heart rate and hence, blood pressure medications which are known to decrease heart rate must be avoided before undergoing the test. Patients who are contraindicated include those who recently had a heart surgery, has unstable angina, already had a heart attack or suffer from severely narrowed valve because they might collapse during the test.

What is the cost of the test?

The cost of the stress test might vary from the hospital to hospital. However, in most diagnostic centres the cost ranges from Rs 1500 to Rs 2000.

When to expect the report?

You can expect the results immediately after the test, within 1 hour.

Also read about [8 things your cardiologist wants you to know](#)

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