Exercise Stress Test

A stress test, sometimes called an exercise test, helps your doctor find out how well your body works when you are active. This test measures how well your heart, lungs and muscles function during physical activity. You will start out walking on a treadmill or riding a bicycle at a low level of exercise. At certain times the difficulty of the exercise is increased until you reach a point where you feel you cannot continue exercising.

EKG or ECG (Electrocardiogram)

1. Before the test begins, the technician will record your height and weight.
2. The skin on your chest will be cleaned with an alcohol swab.
3. Then small electrodes will be placed on your chest (Picture 1). This does not hurt but may leave some skin redness. The redness will go away a few hours after testing.

Once the electrodes are in place, monitor wires called leads will be attached to the electrodes. These wires are connected to a box worn on a belt around your waist. They are connected to a machine with a television monitor that records electrical activity of your heart.

Breathing Tests

Different types of breathing tests may be done during your exercise test depending on the reason for the testing. Pulmonary function tests are done before and after exercise to test your lung abilities. During these tests you will wear a nose clip and be asked to blow through a special mouthpiece that is connected to a computer. The results of these tests help us to identify lung problems that might affect your ability to exercise.

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Breathing Tests, continued

The second type of breathing test is done while you exercise on the bike or treadmill (Picture 2). You will wear special headgear that looks like a bicycle helmet and breathe through a snorkel-like mouthpiece connected to a special computer. The air that is collected during exercise tells the doctor how well your lungs and heart are working during exercise.

Oxygen Saturation

A small Band-Aid®-like sticker will be attached to your index finger before starting the exercise. This sticker has a special red light that detects how much oxygen is in your body.

Blood Pressure

You will wear a blood pressure cuff wrapped around the upper part of your arm. When the technician checks your blood pressure, you will feel the cuff get tight around your arm and then slowly become looser. In special cases, blood pressure measurements may also be performed on the leg.

After the Test

Once you have reached a point in the exercise where you cannot go any farther the test will be over. When the exercise portion of the test is finished you will be asked to identify the reasons that you needed to stop the test. The EKG lead wires will stay attached for about 10 to 15 minutes after you exercise so the technician can monitor your heart while you rest. If you did breathing tests before you exercised, you will be asked to do those again afterward to see how your lungs work when you have been active.