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Italian

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Cantonese

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Gujarati

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Kurdish

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Urdu



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Document History

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Department	Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ www.addenbrookes.org.uk
Contact number	01223 216513
Published	November 2006
Review date	November 2008
File name	Exercise_tests.doc
Version number	2
Ref	PIN 1445

Cardiology

Patient Information

A guide to exercise tests for inpatients

What is an exercise test?

This test is also known as a stress test or treadmill test. It is designed to see how your heart performs during exercise. You are connected to a heart monitor and blood pressure cuff. You are then asked to walk on a treadmill, starting slowly and gradually increasing your speed. The treadmill machine is similar to a treadmill in a gym and an incline is used to increase the effort required.

Why do I need to have an exercise test?

If you already know you have coronary heart disease or if you've had a heart attack or angina, exercise testing can help the doctor assess the condition of your heart and plan further treatment or rehabilitation.

There is no pass or fail to the test. This test is a good way of assessing whether your chest pain or discomfort is indeed caused by coronary heart disease. It may be related to other problems so it can also be a screening test to exclude coronary heart disease.

Whilst an exercise test is considered a low risk procedure, complications can arise which may include:

- **Chest pain**
- **Breathlessness**
- **Dizziness**
- **Palpitations**
- **1 in 1000 risk of major complications such as a heart attack**

Exercise tolerance tests are supervised by a health professional. They will stop the tests if signs of distress are seen or if enough information is gained. The doctor will discuss the test results with you.

Preparation for the test

It is advisable not to eat a heavy meal within two hours of the test. Wear lightweight clothing to avoid over-heating and flat comfortable shoes.

What happens?

You will be connected to an ECG system and blood pressure cuff and advised about the exercise test procedure on the treadmill. ECG stands for electrocardiogram; this records the electrical activity of the heart. Small electrodes are attached to the chest with sticky pads and then connected to an ECG machine. This picks up and amplifies the electrical signals produced with each heartbeat and is recorded on a chart. An ECG does not affect your heart in any way and it should not cause discomfort.

The exercise test starts off at a slow walking pace and is then made progressively harder by increasing the speed and incline. You will be supervised throughout the test and your ECG readings, blood pressure and breathing will be carefully monitored. The staff will advise you when you stop. You will be in the department for approximately 30 minutes by which time the staff will have all the measurements they need. It can be hard work and do ask to stop if you experience pain, excessive shortness of breath or fatigue at any time. Most people are surprised at how much they can achieve.

If you cannot do the test due to other conditions limiting you, for example lung disease or severe arthritis, we may recommend you have other tests instead.

The exercise test may be done whilst you are in hospital. Otherwise an outpatient appointment will be booked for approximately three to four weeks time.

Results

You will be asked to rest in the hospital after the test for approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This allows for recovery or you will return to the ward. If significant changes are seen on either ECG or the blood pressure readings, this may indicate that you need to have further investigations or treatment for your coronary heart disease.