

Having an exercise stress echocardiogram: angina

Your doctor has decided that you should have an exercise stress echocardiogram. This leaflet explains what it does and how it is carried out.

What is it?

- ♥ 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 are taken of your heart.

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 – a sonographer 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 will 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.

Are there any special precautions that I need to take before the stress echocardiogram?

- ♥ **You must NOT take beta-blocker and some calcium-channel blocker tablets need to be paused for 48 hours before the test.** Beta-blocker tablets include Atenolol, Bisoprolol and Carvedilol, although there are others. The Calcium-channel blockers that need to be paused are called Diltiazem and Verapamil. Medication with Amlodipine has to be continued. If you do continue taking the above drugs, the exercise echo may need to be postponed. If you have any doubts, please contact our department on 0118 322 6515.
- ♥ You should continue other medication as normal.

At the end of your echocardiogram

- ♥ You will be able to return home after the test has been completed. You may undertake your day-to-day activities as usual.

Are there any risks in having the exercise echo?

- ♥ The exercise echo scan is extremely safe as it is just like exercising as if you were at home.
- ♥ 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 Cardiac Department, Level 1, Battle Block at the date and time mentioned on the attached letter. **We would be grateful if you could arrive 15 minutes before your stated appointment time.**
- ♥ Please do not eat a heavy meal within 2 hours before your test. Alcohol and caffeine are to be avoided for 12 hours prior to the study. Drinks containing caffeine include: coffee, tea and cola.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the department on 0118 322 6515.

Useful contacts

Royal Berkshire Hospital	0118 322 5111
Cardiac Reception Enquiries	0118 322 6515

British Heart Foundation: www.bhf.org.uk

West Berkshire Heart Support Group – ‘Heartbeats’

Heartbeats website: www.heartbeats-berkshire.co.uk

More information is available on the Trust website www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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