

EXERCISE STRESS TESTING

This pamphlet has been designed by the health care professionals of Marquette General Hospital to provide you with information on exercise stress testing and why it is done.

❖ WHAT IS AN EXERCISE STRESS TEST?

An exercise stress test may be called a Treadmill Test, Exercise Tolerance Test, Graded Exercise Test, Stress Electrocardiogram Test, Exercise EKG, or Exercise Electrocardiogram. Although the name may differ the purpose of the test is the same-to give your doctor more information about how your heart is working when it is stressed by exercise.

❖ WHY IS AN EXERCISE STRESS TEST DONE?

Exercise Stress Tests can be done for the following reasons:

- to help diagnose the cause of chest pain.
- to check for possible blockage in the heart arteries.
- after heart surgery or a heart attack.
- to set up an exercise program that is right for you.
- to see if your medicine is treating chest pain/irregular heartbeats.
- as a baseline before treatment is started.

The Exercise Stress Test measures how much exercise you can safely do.

❖ HOW IS AN EXERCISE STRESS DONE?

An Exercise Stress Test may take up to 90 minutes from start to finish. The exercise part of the test is no longer than 20 minutes of actual exercise. This test is done in several steps, it is noninvasive and no needles are used. Before the test is started you will be asked to review your medical history, including your

current medicines, with the staff. Current medicines includes the medicines you are taking from all your doctors as well as any over-the-counter medicines.

- Your chest will be cleaned and scrubbed, it may also be shaved. Ten electrodes will be placed on your chest. These electrodes are used to connect you to the heart monitor which will show the doctor your heart rate and EKG pattern throughout the test.
- Before you begin the exercise part of the test, an EKG and blood pressure will be taken while you are sitting, standing, and lying on the exam table. This provides baseline information about your heart.
- The doctor (or assistant) will be called to supervise the rest of the test. The staff will show you the proper way to walk on the treadmill. Please feel free to ask questions at any time. When the doctor (or assistant) is ready you will begin walking on the treadmill. Once you are walking on comfortably the exercise part of the test will begin. The test calls for increasing amounts of work, usually every three minutes, by increasing the treadmill speed and making the grade (uphill slant) steeper. It is important that you describe any symptoms that you feel during the test to the staff. You will need to exercise (test) until you are tired or feel chest pain, shortness of breath, discomfort or fatigue. Your doctor or assistant will be watching for changes in your EKG or blood pressure and may stop the test before you develop symptoms.
- When the exercise part of the test is over the treadmill will slow down and stop. You will be asked to walk to the bed in the test room to sit down right away. While you rest

your blood pressure and EKG will continue to be watched until they return to resting levels.

- We may ask that you rest (cool down) in the waiting area for 30 minutes before leaving the area.

❖ PREPARATION FOR AN EXERCISE STRESS TEST

Day before test:

- Drink plenty of liquids the day before the test.
- Take your usual medicine, unless the doctor tell you not to.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Check with your doctor to see if you should take your medicine on the day of the test.
- If you are DIABETIC check with your doctor to see if you should take your medicine.

Day of the test:

- Bring a list of your current medicine to your appointment. Include all prescribed medicine and over-the-counter medicine you take. Bring reading glasses if used.
- If you are having your test in the morning:
 - don't eat anything after midnight.
 - no caffeine or alcohol.
 - don't drink anything within four (4) hours of the test. You may take your medicine with a sip of water.
 - don't smoke or use any tobacco after midnight.
 - don't do any exercise or hard physical activity.
- If you are having your test in the afternoon:
 - you may eat a light breakfast before 9 a.m.
 - no caffeine or alcohol.
 - don't eat anything after 9 a.m.
 - don't drink anything within four (4) hours of the test. You may take your medicine with a sip of water.

- don't smoke or use tobacco.
- don't do any exercise or hard physical activity.
- What to wear:
 - wear loose comfortable clothing and comfortable walking shoes. Wear or bring slacks or shorts for walking. Avoid tight undergarments. Walking or tennis shoes are best, but any comfortable, flat shoes or boots that can not slip off your feet are OK.

❖ AFTER THE EXERCISE STRESS TEST

You will be given the results of the test before you leave the testing area. Please rest 20 minutes before leaving the building.

If exercise makes you very tired, you may want to bring someone to drive you home.

❖ WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS/RISKS OF EXERCISE STRESS TESTING?

Exercise stress testing is very safe. It will help your doctor diagnose a problem, and/or find out how much activity is safe for you.

The risk of death during or right after the test is less than 1 in 10,000 people. About 1 in 1,000 people may have a problem that will result in going to the hospital. During the test there is a slight risk of having a heart attack. Very rarely the heart will begin to beat with a dangerous rhythm. You will be watched at all times during the test. Emergency equipment and trained people are on hand at all times.

- **It is your job** to tell the doctor about any different feelings you may have when you are active at home or on a job. It is important that you tell how you feel during the test.

- **Asking questions** about the test will help you understand.
- **What your test results mean** *for you* depends on many things, including why the test is being done. Your doctor will explain the test results to you, and what it means for you.