Cardiac Physiology Clinical Unit

Exercise Tolerance Test
Information for patients

This information sheet tells you about the exercise tolerance test (also known as a stress test). If you have any questions you may contact this department before the procedure on Oxford (01865) 220258, or ask a member of staff in the Cardiac Physiology Unit at the time of your appointment.

Organizations such as the British Heart Foundation have leaflets and information about heart investigations and heart conditions that you may find helpful: www.bhf.org.uk or telephone 08450 708070.

What is the reason for the test?
The test shows how the heart functions under stress. It can help detect heart problems such as angina. When symptoms such as dizziness or palpitations occur with exercise, it can identify abnormal heart rhythms. It can also show how effective treatments are.

What is an exercise tolerance test?
The test is performed by a professionally trained cardiac physiologist. It involves walking on a treadmill (moving belt) whilst your heart is monitored by an electrocardiogram (ECG). The treadmill will start at a level which you can easily manage and then the speed and elevation will gradually be increased at measured stages (every 3 minutes). Your blood pressure will be monitored throughout the test. The test will be stopped if you have any discomfort or if the physiologist feels that you have done enough exercise.

Are there any risks?
There is a very small risk of arrhythmias (a problem with the rate or rhythm of the heartbeat) or cardiac arrest. Your heart will be monitored at all times and staff are trained in cardiac resuscitation and emergency procedures in the unlikely event of any problem. There is an emergency stop button on the treadmill which the physiologist can press at any time if necessary.

Before coming to your appointment
It is important that you do not use any moisturisers on the day of your appointment. These can interfere with the adhesive nature of the electrodes that we use to record your ECG.

Please bring a list of medication that you are currently taking. Let us know as soon as possible if you have a cold, chest infection or any other illness which may prevent you from attending.

It is not possible to tell you in advance whether your stress test will be carried out by a male or female operator. If you prefer a female staff member to be present then please advise the
department at least one week in advance. Every effort will be made to accommodate your needs. You may bring a friend or family member with you; however, they will not be able to accompany you during the actual test.

As you will be exercising, it is advisable to wear comfortable clothing which allows freedom of movement. Women may prefer to wear trousers. Footwear should be comfortable – e.g. trainers. For one hour before the test do not eat a heavy meal, drink alcohol, smoke or undertake any vigorous exercise.

On arrival at the clinic

We will be expecting you and will try not to keep you waiting. You should expect to be in the department for at least 40 minutes. A member of staff will collect you from the waiting room and will explain the nature of the test.

What happens during the test?

You will need to remove all clothing, down to your waist, as ECG electrodes need to be attached to your chest to monitor your heart. A gown will be provided for female patients.

What happens afterwards?

The test will be reviewed by your doctor and the results will be discussed with you during your next outpatient appointment.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions or concerns before your procedure, please telephone:

John Radcliffe Hospital: Oxford (01865) 220258
Horton General Hospital: Banbury (01295) 229099

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk