

Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)

The Electrocardiogram is used worldwide as a simple way of diagnosing heart conditions.

What Is an EKG?

An electrocardiogram — also called an EKG or ECG — is a test that measures the electrical activity of the heartbeat.

Whenever your heart beats, an electrical impulse (or “wave”) travels through the heart. This wave causes your heart muscle to squeeze and pump blood around your body.

Why Might I Need an EKG?



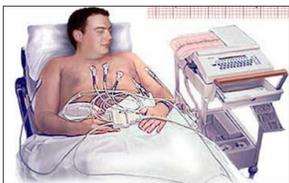
EKGs are usually done to see if your heart has problems. The results commonly show:

- How fast your heart is beating
- Whether your heart is beating properly
- The size of your heart
- Possible infection
- New or old injuries to your heart muscle

The test results can give your doctor valuable information about your heart to help make the right treatment choices.

What to Expect

The EKG is a painless, simple test that takes 5 to 10 minutes.



- You lie on a bed or examination table.
- Several sticker sensors called electrodes are placed on the skin of your arms, legs, and chest. They can be cold at first.
- The electrodes are connected to wires called leads, which are connected to the EKG machine.
- The electrical activity of the heart is then recorded on a moving strip of paper in the EKG machine.

What Does It Show? If your EKG is abnormal, it can mean that your heart may have a problem that needs to be treated. However, 9 out of 10 people with an abnormal EKG do not develop heart trouble.

If you have a normal EKG it does not necessarily mean that your heart is fine. But your doctor can use the information to make sure you do not have certain heart problems.

If you have an abnormal EKG or certain other heart problems, your doctor may ask you to take another test. An Exercise Tolerance Test measures your heart's activity during exercise.

Resources

American Heart Association

American Heart Association

National Center

7272 Greenville Avenue

Dallas, TX 75231

Phone: (800) AHA-USA-1 (242-8721)

Web site: www.americanheart.org

The Heart Association is a prominent national organization involved in education and research in heart disease. They have a number of products useful to heart failure patients, including a general guide to living well with heart failure, and instructions on diet and exercise for those with heart disease. These materials can be obtained by calling the telephone number above and speaking with their counselors. Single copies of most materials are free.

Web Site

www.medlineplus.gov

Up-to-date, quality health care information. Go to Health Topics, "Heart Diseases."