

Nuclear Stress Test

What is a nuclear stress test?

- This test measures blood flow to your heart. It can also show any damaged heart muscle.
- A camera will take 64 pictures of your heart after physical activity and 64 pictures of your heart at rest.
- You will be given a radioactive isotope (tracing substance) via IV so your doctor can see the heart muscle better.



Who takes this test?

You may take this test if:

- you have already been diagnosed with a heart condition
- you have risk factors such as high blood pressure or a family history of heart disease
- your doctor suspects you have heart disease or another heart problem
- the exercise stress test alone was not enough to pinpoint the cause of symptoms like chest pain or shortness of breath

How should you prepare for the test?

- Do not eat or drink for at least four hours before the test.
- Some of your morning medicine may be given after your test. Ask about taking an inhaler.
- You may wear your own clothes (including bra) and shoes for the test. You may want a friend or family member to bring comfortable clothes and shoes with non-skid soles. We have non-slip socks that you can wear on the treadmill too.
- You will be given your first dose of the tracing substance that shows your heart picture about 45 minutes before your test.
- Please tell us if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. We do not want you to take this test because of the radioactive tracing substance.

What happens during the test?

- You will lie down on a table. Put your arms behind your head to open your chest for the imaging. The camera/scanner looks like a giant round doughnut. It is not an enclosed tube. Your head and arms will be outside the scanner.
- You will hear “click click” sounds as the camera takes the 64 pictures. It takes about 14 minutes to get all the pictures. Please tell us if you have pain or discomfort. After this set of pictures, your stress test will begin.
- You will get your heart rate up by walking on a treadmill for about 10 minutes. If you are not able to walk on the treadmill, you will be given medicine that will make your heart feel like it is exercising even though you are sitting in a chair.
- We will continue to monitor your heart rate and blood pressure during the test. Speak up if you become short of breath, feel pain, or get too tired.
- When you reach your target heart rate, you will get another dose of the tracing substance to help see your heart.
- Then you will go to the waiting room for 30-40 minutes. This allows the tracing substance time to enter the heart muscle and improve picture quality.
- After the 30-40 minutes, we will ask you to lie down on the scanner table again so we can repeat the imaging process.

How long does the test take? The stress test takes two to four hours to complete.