

Departments -> Exercise Testing

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Exercise testing is performed on children and adolescents to observe the changes that occur in the heart during stressful activity. Because complaints such as chest pain, irregular heartbeat, and shortness of breath are often related to physical activity, an examination at rest may not give a complete picture of heart function or fitness level. The goal of the test is to reproduce the level of activity that causes symptoms, and then to determine whether or not these symptoms are a sign of heart disease by observing the EKG, blood pressure, or an echocardiogram.

Exercise testing can also be used to determine an activity level that is safe or beneficial for a young person with known heart disease. Testing can help us determine if competitive sports are safe and can guide us in recommending appropriate physical activities to improve overall fitness. In some children, exercise testing may be used to evaluate the need for surgery or the response to medications.

If your child is scheduled for an exercise stress test we recommend:

- The patient should wear or bring comfortable pants or shorts to the visit.
- The patient should wear or bring running shoes, tennis shoes or sneakers.
- Girls of appropriate age should wear a sports bra.
- The patient should eat only a light breakfast or lunch on the day of the test.
- If the patient is using inhalers, please discontinue use for twenty-four hours before the test.

HOWEVER, CHECK WITH YOUR PEDIATRICIAN BEFORE STOPPING THE MEDICATIONS.

IF YOUR CHILD IS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE, AN ADULT CARETAKER MUST BE AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT THE APPOINTMENT.

What to expect

At Children's Hospital and Research Center at Oakland exercise testing is usually performed on a treadmill. The child walks at a moderate pace on a slight incline. The duration of exercise is measured, and EKG, heart rate and blood pressure are recorded. Some patients have their lung function tested at the same time by breathing into a mouthpiece.

The test is performed under the close observation of a cardiologist in a relaxed setting. Children as young as age seven can usually perform well. In most cases the risk of testing is very low since the levels of exertions are similar to normal play or sports activities and the test is performed in the hospital, with equipment to treat emergencies close at hand.



Disclaimer: The information provided here is intended to educate the reader about certain medical conditions and certain possible treatment. It is not a substitute for examination, diagnosis, and medical care provided by a licensed and qualified health professional. If you believe you, your child, or someone you know, suffer from the conditions described herein, please see your health care provider immediately. Do not attempt to treat yourself, your child or anyone else without proper medical supervision.

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