

Patient information factsheet

Electrocardiogram (ECG)

We've written this factsheet to give you more information about having an electrocardiogram (ECG). It explains what an ECG is, what the test involves, and what the possible risks are. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team or contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

We will explain the test in more detail to you during your appointment and answer any questions you may have.

Having an electrocardiogram (ECG)?

An ECG is a test which records the rhythm, rate and electrical activity of your heart.

Your doctor may refer you for an ECG as part of a general health check or if they suspect you have a heart condition.

An ECG can be used to help diagnose and monitor conditions affecting the heart, such as:

- **arrhythmias** – where the heart beats too slowly, too quickly, or irregularly
- **coronary heart disease** – where the heart's blood supply is blocked or interrupted by a build-up of fatty substances
- **heart attacks** – where the supply of blood to the heart is suddenly blocked
- **cardiomyopathy** – where the heart walls become thickened or enlarged

An ECG is usually one of the first tests you will have to check for heart problems. However, it does have some limitations, so often you will need to have additional tests to confirm a diagnosis.

Preparing for your test

Food and drink

You can eat and drink as normal before the test.

Hospital transport

If you require hospital transport to your appointment, please contact your GP surgery as soon as you receive your appointment letter to ask them to arrange it for you.

At the appointment

Before the test, we will ask you to remove all of your clothing from your waist up (including a bra, if you are wearing one). We may also ask you to remove tights or stockings. If you have a hairy chest, we may need to shave you before the test in order for the small, sticky patches (electrodes) to stick to your skin properly.

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We will then place some electrodes on your chest, wrists and ankles. These electrodes will detect the electrical signals produced by your heart each time it beats. The signals will be recorded and converted by an ECG machine into a graph, which will either be displayed electronically or printed out on paper. The ECG recording will then be reviewed by your doctor to check for any unusual activity.

During the test, you will need to lie as still as possible, as any sudden movements will make it hard to get a good quality recording.

You may request to have a chaperone present during your ECG. If you would like a chaperone, please speak to a member of our team before your appointment.

An ECG usually takes between five and ten minutes.

After your test

You will usually be able to go home straight after the test.

Possible risks

An ECG is a quick, safe and painless test. No electricity is put into your body while it's carried out.

Your results

We will either send your results to the hospital consultant who referred you for this test or directly to your GP. You will usually be given your results during your next clinic appointment with your hospital consultant.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Non-invasive cardiology team

Telephone: **023 8120 6404** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm)

Useful links

www.uhs.nhs.uk/OurServices/Bloodandcirculation/Noninvasivecardiology/Non-InvasiveCardiology.aspx

www.nhs.uk/conditions/electrocardiogram

www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/tests/ecg

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