

ELECTROCARDIOGRAM (ECG)

An electrocardiogram or ECG is used to record the rhythm and electrical activity of your heart and can help to diagnose whether or not you are experiencing heart problems or have heart disease. Your GP can refer you here or you may be referred by your local hospital. All local hospitals will have ECG and exercise testing facilities.

If you have come to the outpatient clinic to see a doctor, they may request that you have an ECG that day and you will be asked to go along to the ECG department.

Patients who are about to have an operation of any kind are often given an ECG test to make sure there are no problems with your heart function.

An Exercise ECG is a normal ECG carried out whilst you are on a running machine or exercise bike Freeman will always use a treadmill to monitor your heart function during exercise.

BEFORE YOUR PROCEDURE

Wear light, comfortable clothes and shoes. Don't have a heavy meal before you have your ECG.

Exercise raises your pulse rate. However, this effect shows up less in people who are taking beta-blockers (a type of medicine for the heart).

If you take beta-blockers, the doctor may advise you to stop taking them for one or two days before the test.

DURING YOUR PROCEDURE

Several small sticky patches are put on your arms, legs and chest. The patches, called 'electrodes', are connected to wires which lead to a recording machine.

The recording machine picks up the electrical signals produced by each heartbeat. It records a few beats from each set of electrodes onto paper. The ECG machine only records signals from your body. It does not give electric shocks and does not affect your heart in any way.

The whole test takes about five minutes and will not be uncomfortable at all.

AFTER YOUR PROCEDURE

If you have been referred by your GP, the results of your ECG test will be sent to directly and your GP will arrange to discuss these with you at a time convenient to you.

If you have come from clinic, you will be given the results by the Cardiographer and asked to return to the clinic to see your consultant. Your results can be discussed there and then.

An ECG can detect problems with your heart rhythm. It can sometimes show if a person has had a heart attack, either recently or some time ago. Sometimes it can show if the heart may be working under strain.

The ECG is a simple and useful test but it has some limitations. An abnormal reading does not always mean that there is something wrong. On the other hand, some people may have a normal ECG recording even though they do have heart disease. This is why you may need to have one or more other tests as well as the ECG.

To find out more about this or any other treatments and procedures log onto the [British Heart Foundation website](#).