The rhythm of your Heart: ECG

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Health City Hospital, Guwahati In India, out of the estimated population of more than 1.5 billion dispersed across various geographical regions, about 45 million people suffer from heart disease. According to current estimates, India will soon have the highest number of cases of cardiovascular disease in the world. The electrocardiogram (ECG) is one of the simplest and oldest investigations done to detect heart disease. With modern machines, ECGs are quick and easy to obtain at the bedside and are based on relatively simple electrophysiological concepts.

What Is an Electrocardiogram (ECG)?

The electrocardiogram (ECG) is a diagnostic tool that is commonly used to assess the electrical and muscular functions of the heart. While it is a relatively simple test to perform, the interpretation of the ECG tracing requires significant amounts of training.

When is an ECG required?

A doctor may advise an ECG if a patient is experiencing symptoms like chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, fainting or has palpitations. Some common conditions that are diagnosed using this method are abnormal heart beats, enlargement of the heart, damaged heart muscles, heart attack etc. Most heart related conditions can be diagnosed or identified by an ECG.

How an ECG is taken out?

The procedure is quick, painless and doesn't require hospitalization

The patient will be asked to lie down on a bed, after which the technician will attach electrodes to the chest. Electrode leads on the chest wall are able to detect electrical impulses that are generated by the heart. An electrode lead, or patch, is placed on each arm and leg and six are placed across the chest wall. The signals received from each electrode are recorded. It takes about ten to fifteen minutes for a doctor or technician to take the test and the results can be seen immediately. By interpreting the tracing, the physician can learn about the heart rate and rhythm as well as blood flow to the heart.

What are the Dos and don'ts during an ECG?

In order to undergo an ECG there are a few things one should be prepared for. If you are a man, the technician may need to shave a part of your chest hair in order to attach the electrodes to your skin. If you are a woman you will require removing your jewellery before the procedure. As a precaution, if you are on any medication for heart disease, it is best to discuss with your doctor about stopping the medicine a few hours before the procedure in order to get accurate readings.

How should one prepare? Some things you can do to get yourself ready:

- Avoid oily or greasy skin creams and lotions the day of the test because they can keep the electrodes from making contact with your skin.
- Avoid full-length hosiery, because electrodes need to be placed directly on your legs.
- Wear a shirt that you can remove easily to place the leads on your chest.

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