

Pharmacologic Stress Echocardiogram

A non-exercise stress echocardiogram (echo) test is used to detect significant coronary artery disease (CAD), a blockage of blood flow to the heart. This test provides a more detailed picture of how your heart works during periods of rest and exercise. This test is also known as a pharmacologic stress echocardiogram.

If you have any questions,
please talk with your
physician.


During the exam, you will receive a medication to increase the rate and force of your heartbeat (similar to what happens during exercise).

The echocardiogram uses high-frequency sound waves (ultrasound) to look at how the different parts of the heart work. If significant CAD is present, the stress echo will often show changes in how the heart muscle contracts.

Before the test

- › Do not eat or drink for 5 hours before your test. Take your usual medications with small sips of water unless your physician tells you otherwise.
- › Be sure to take your blood pressure medication.
- › Do not put lotion or powder on your body on the morning of the exam.

Plan to arrive 15 minutes before your appointment.



Go to the Reception Desk on the 8th floor of Galter Pavilion, 201 East Huron Street. Parking is available for patients and visitors in the garage at 222 East Huron Street, across from Feinberg and Galter pavilions. For a discounted rate, bring your parking ticket with you. You can validate your ticket at the Customer Service Desks on the 1st and 2nd floors of Feinberg and Galter pavilions or the 1st floor of Prentice Women's Hospital.

Allow 1 1/2 to 2 hours from arrival until the exam is complete.

Also, be sure to bring:

- › A list of your allergies
- › A list of all your current medications (prescription, over-the-counter and herbal)
- › Photo ID
- › Medical insurance information
- › Medicare card (Medicare patients only)

Upon arrival

The care team will explain the test to you, including the benefits and risks. They will then ask you to consent to the test.


You will need to undress from the waist up and put on a hospital gown.

During the test

During the test, you will lie down on a special echo exam bed. The care team will put electrodes on your chest to record an electrocardiogram (ECG) during the test. If necessary, they may shave the chest area so the electrodes will stick well. The nurse will insert an IV (into the vein) line into your arm.

For the echocardiogram, they will put a small transducer (probe) coated with a light gel on your chest to get images of your heart.

The nurse will infuse the medication into the IV and slowly increase it until you reach the desired heart rate or symptoms develop. Although dobutamine is the most common medication for this test, you may receive other medications instead. The medication may cause a pounding sensation in your chest; this is normal.



Let the care team know if you feel these symptoms.

- › Urge to urinate
- › Palpitations
- › Feeling of warmth or flushing
- › Nausea
- › Headache
- › Abdominal discomfort
- › Chest discomfort

Once the medication is stopped, all symptoms should slowly go away.

The nurse and exercise physiologist will monitor you during the test.
A cardiologist is also present in area during the test.

After the test

As you rest for the next 20 to 30 minutes, the care team will check your heart rate and blood pressure. You may go back to your regular diet.

If you have any questions or concerns about this test, call the echocardiogram scheduling team at 312.926.7483 (TTY: 711).

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at [nm.org](https://www.nm.org).