

Cardiology services

Having an exercise tolerance test (ETT)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

This leaflet tells you about having an exercise tolerance test and answers some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have. Please ask our care team if you have any question.

What is an exercise tolerance test?

An exercise tolerance test, also known as exercise treadmill testing, is a procedure we use to assess heart function and cardiovascular health.

During this test, we'll ask you to walk and/or jog on a treadmill. We will gradually increase the treadmill's intensity and speed. We will connect you to a set of leads (electrodes) to record your heart rhythm and a blood pressure machine to monitor your vital signs.

The test will last about 30 minutes.

Why do I need to have an exercise tolerance test?

An exercise tolerance test may have been recommended for you for several reasons. You might have experienced chest pain or shortness of breath, particularly during exercise or exertion, which a resting electrocardiogram couldn't identify the reason for. An exercise tolerance test will be particularly helpful to find out if these symptoms are related to your heart.

Your cardiologist will have recommended this test based on your specific symptoms, medical history, risk factors, or as part of a heart health evaluation. It's always best to ask your cardiologist about the specific reasons you need the test to understand how it relates to your health situation.

Are there any risks associated with this test?

The risks involved in having the exercise tolerance test will vary from patient to patient depending on your medical history. Your cardiologist will talk to you about the risks in more detail. Complications are rare (1 in 10,000) but there is a risk of:

- heart rhythm disorders
- heart attack
- collapse

What I need to know before having an exercise tolerance test?

If you need a chaperone and/or an interpreter

If you need someone to come into the appointment with you (a chaperone), please tell the receptionist when you arrive for your appointment.

If you need an interpreter, please contact us on the number for your cardiac department (see below) three days before your appointment. We can then book an interpreter for your appointment.

Plan your journey

Many people benefit from planning their journey to the hospital. Knowing your route can help you get there in plenty of time for your appointment. There are a small number of general and disabled car parking spaces at the different hospitals (except for St Mary's).

For help with journey planning or patient transport, please visit: www.imperial.nhs.uk > [our location](#) > choose the correct hospital > hospital map > parking and www.tfl.gov.uk.

How should I prepare for an exercise tolerance test?

Before coming to the hospital for your appointment, it is important for you to:

- take your medications as prescribed, unless your cardiologist tells you not to
- not have a heavy meal before your exercise tolerance test – you might find it uncomfortable to exercise with a full stomach
- wear **comfortable clothing** and **supportive footwear** – please put on a top and trousers (not a dress or one-piece outfit) as we'll attach electrode leads to your chest and a blood pressure monitor to your upper bare arm

If you want, you can shave or remove any hair from the chest area (if possible) on your own. If not, we can do this for you on the day of the appointment.

Please bring only essential items and don't wear jewelry to your appointment.

What happens on the day of my appointment?

Please arrive 10 to 15 minutes before the time for your appointment and go to the cardiology reception desk.

Charing Cross Hospital

- 020 3311 1028
- Cardiac Investigation Unit, Fifth floor, Charing Cross Hospital, Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8RF

Hammersmith Hospital

- 020 3313 3951
- Cardiac Investigation Unit, Hammersmith Hospital, Ground floor, B block, Du Cane Road, London W12 0HS

St Mary's Hospital

- 020 3312 1241
- Waller Cardiovascular Unit, Ground floor, Mary Stanford Wing, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY

The exercise tolerance test process

- the cardiac physiologist will take you to a room where you'll do your exercise tolerance test and explain the process to you in detail
- we will ask you to change into a hospital gown and lie/sit down on a bed
- the cardiac physiologist will clean your chest and shave it if necessary
- then they will put ten electrodes onto your chest, and connect them to leads that will go around your waist using an adjustable belt and then take you to the treadmill
- they'll put an inflatable cuff around one of your upper arms, and it will fill with air at different stages of the test – when it inflates and deflates it might feel a bit tender or uncomfortable, but this will only last for a short time
- the cardiac physiologist will start the treadmill and monitor and record your heart rhythm and blood pressure intermittently including when the speed and intensity changes, they will tell you beforehand and ask you about how you're feeling
- if you get tired, feel short of breath or have chest discomfort during the test, please tell them straight away – then they can slow down and stop the treadmill machine
- once the treadmill has stopped, we'll ask you to sit down on a chair or lie on a bed to recover

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages.

Please email the communications team: imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: <https://www.imperial.nhs.uk>

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