

Cardiology services

Having an Exercise Tolerance Test (ETT)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

This leaflet aims to tell you about having an exercise tolerance test and answer some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your medical team.

Contacts

From Monday to Friday, between 09.00 and 17.00

Cardiac Investigations Department: **020 3313 3951** (Hammersmith Hospital)
 020 3312 1241 (St Mary's Hospital)
 020 3311 1028 (Charing Cross Hospital)

Transport booking team: **033 0678 1245**
 (Monday to Friday: 08.00–20.00,
 Saturday and Sunday: 10.00–13.00)

For out of hours, please contact NHS **111** for advice and health information.

What is an exercise tolerance test?

An exercise tolerance test, also known as exercise treadmill testing, is a diagnostic procedure used to look at heart function and cardiovascular health.

During this test, you will be instructed to walk and/or jog on a treadmill that gradually increases in intensity and speed. While this happens you will be connected to a set of electrode leads to record your heart rhythm and a blood pressure machine to monitor your vital signs.

Why has an exercise tolerance test been recommended for me?

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. An exercise tolerance test will be particularly helpful to find out if these symptoms are related to your heart.

An exercise tolerance test can also be used to diagnose coronary artery disease and detect any abnormal heart rhythms that happen during physical activity.

Your cardiologist will have recommended this test based on your specific symptoms, medical history, risk factors, or as part of a comprehensive heart health evaluation. It's always best to discuss the specific reasons for the test with your cardiologist to understand how it relates to your individual 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 discuss the risks in more detail with you before ordering this exercise tolerance test for you.

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 have been unwell

If you have had vomiting or diarrhea, a cough, cold or skin infection with or without a fever during the 3 days before your appointment, please contact your cardiac investigations department.

If you need a chaperone and/or an interpreter

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

If you need an interpreter, please contact the appropriate cardiac investigations department 3 days before your appointment, so we can arrange one 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 Hospital).

For help with journey planning, please visit: <https://www.imperial.nhs.uk> > our-location > choose the correct hospital > hospital map > parking and <https://www.tfl.gov.uk>.

If you are not available for your appointment

Please contact your cardiac investigations department immediately if you cannot attend your appointment.

This allows us to

- agree a new appointment date and time with you and
- offer another patient your original appointment

We will always aim to reschedule your appointment to the next available date.

If you are running late for your appointment, please contact the appropriate cardiac investigations department to tell them when you think you will arrive.

What happens if I need transport?

In line with Department of Health guidelines, we have a non-emergency transport service for patients whose clinical condition or mobility makes it very difficult for them to attend hospital without transport assistance.

Please visit our website for more details <https://www.imperial.nhs.uk> > patients and visitors > help and support > patient transport.

How should I prepare for an exercise tolerance test?

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

- take your medications as prescribed, unless advised by your cardiologist
- don't have a heavy meal before your exercise tolerance test as you might find it uncomfortable to exercise with a full stomach
- wear **comfortable clothing** and **supportive footwear**. Please put on a top and trousers rather than a dress or one-piece outfit as you will be attached with electrode leads on your chest and a blood pressure monitor on your upper bare arm

You may prefer to 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 jewellery or other valuables when attending your appointment.

You might be in the hospital for a couple of hours, so it is a good idea to bring something to read or listen to with a headset or earphones while you wait.

What happens on the day of my appointment?

Please arrive at the allocated hospital and time stated in your appointment letter.

Note that this will not be the actual time of your exercise tolerance test.

Hammersmith Hospital	St Mary's Hospital	Charing Cross Hospital
Cardiac Investigation Unit Ground floor, B block Hammersmith Hospital Du Cane Road London W12 0HS 020 3313 3951	Waller cardiovascular unit Ground floor Mary Stanford Wing St Mary's Hospital Praed Street London W2 1NY 020 3312 1241	Cardiac Investigation Unit Fifth floor Charing Cross Hospital Fulham Palace Road London W6 8RF 020 3311 1028

Please check in at the reception desk when you arrive.

Please tell the receptionist and/or the cardiac physiologist that is conducting your exercise tolerance test if you need a chaperone or an interpreter during the test.

The exercise tolerance test process

The cardiac physiologist will escort you to a room where your exercise tolerance test will be conducted and the process will be explained to you in detail.

You may be asked to change into a hospital gown and lie/sit down on the bed.

The cardiac physiologist will prep the skin site by cleaning the chest area and shaving any chest hair (if necessary). The cardiac physiologist will then place ten electrode leads onto different positions of your chest using electrode stickers. These electrode leads are connected to a small recording device that will be placed around your waist using an adjustable belt.

The cardiac physiologist will also place an inflatable cuff around one of your upper arms that will inflate at different stages of the exercise tolerance test. You will feel the cuff inflating (filling with air) and deflating and it may feel a bit tender or uncomfortable but this will only last for a short period of time.

During the exercise tolerance test, the cardiac physiologist will continuously monitor and record your heart rhythm and blood pressure. With each change in intensity and speed at different stages of the exercise tolerance test, the cardiac physiologist will tell you beforehand and ask you about any symptoms that you have.

If you experience tiredness, shortness of breath or chest discomfort during the exercise tolerance test, please inform the cardiac physiologist immediately so they can slow down and stop the treadmill machine. Once the treadmill has stopped completely, you will be asked to sit on a chair or bed to recover.

The exercise tolerance test usually takes about 30 minutes.

What happens after my exercise tolerance test?

You may notice some skin irritation or redness around the electrode sticker site. This is normal as your skin may be sensitive after the exercise. It is important to keep the skin area clean and dry.

When will I get the results of my exercise tolerance test?

The results of the exercise tolerance test are uploaded to your hospital electronic medical notes to be reviewed by your cardiologist.

You can discuss the results of your exercise tolerance test with your cardiologist during your outpatient follow-up appointment.

Depending on the results, your cardiologist may recommend further diagnostic tests.

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>