

Alfi Morris Beshay, MD, MSc, FRCP(C)
Internal Medicine & Cardiovascular Disease

ECG – Patient Information Sheet

Definition

- An electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG) records the electrical activity of the heart. No electricity is sent into the body.

Why the test is performed ?

- You may have an ECG to help find the cause of symptoms such as the feeling of a 'thumping heart' (palpitations) or chest pain. Sometimes it is done as part of routine tests - for example, before you have an operation.
- To evaluate problems which may be heart-related, such as severe tiredness, shortness of breath, dizziness, or fainting. To identify irregular heartbeats
- To help determine the overall health of the heart before procedures such as surgery; or after treatment for conditions such as a heart attack; or after heart surgery or cardiac catheterization.
- To determine how well certain heart medicines are working.
- To get a baseline tracing of the heart's function during a physical exam; this may be used as a comparison with future ECGs, to determine if there have been any changes.

How the test is performed ?

- You will be asked to remove any jewelry or other objects that may interfere with the test. You will be asked to remove clothing from the waist up. You will lie flat on a table or bed for the test. It will be important for you to lie still and not talk during the ECG, so that you don't alter the tracing. Several areas on your chest may be shaved and cleaned.
- Small metal electrodes are stuck on to your arms, legs and chest. Wires from the electrodes are connected to the ECG machine. The machine detects and amplifies the electrical impulses that occur at each heartbeat and records them on to a paper or computer. A few heartbeats are recorded from different sets of electrodes. The test takes about five minutes to do..

How to prepare for the test ?

- There is no special preparation for the test.
- You may wear a loose-fitting blouse or shirt. Avoid wearing jewelry or clothes with metal buttons or buckles, because these can interfere with the recording.

How the test will feel ?

- You will not feel anything during the ECG, but it may be uncomfortable when the sticky electrodes are taken off. If the electrode patches are left on too long they may cause tissue breakdown or skin irritation.

What the risks are ?

- There are no risks associated with the test. The electrodes placed on your skin detect only the electrical signals from your heart. No electricity is sent through your body, and there is no possibility of receiving an electric shock.

Special considerations

- Certain factors or conditions may interfere with or affect the results of the ECG:
- These include, but are not limited to: Obesity, Pregnancy, Fluid buildup in the abdomen (ascites), anatomical considerations such as the size of the chest and the location of the heart within the chest, movement during the test, exercise or smoking before the test, and certain medicines.