Intermountain® Healthcare

Electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG)

What is an electrocardiogram?

An **electrocardiogram**, often called an **EKG** or **ECG**, is a test that checks the electrical activity of your heart. This test is fast and painless. No electricity enters your body during the test.

An EKG might be used if you've had chest pains, if you are being treated for a heart problem, or just as part of a regular checkup.

What is the purpose of this test?

Your heart is a large muscle that pumps blood through your body. Your heart works because electrical impulses move through it to prompt each heartbeat. To check your heart health, an EKG records these impulses.

An EKG checks for:

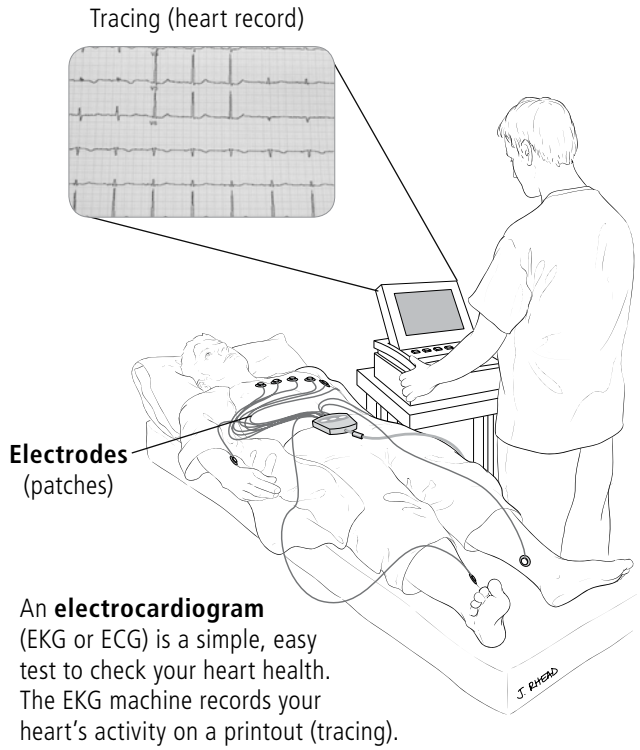
- Problems with your heart rate
- Problems with your heart rhythm
- Damaged heart muscle
- Increased thickness in the heart muscle
- Lack of good blood flow to the heart muscle

An EKG can also show basic information such as how your heart is oriented in your chest cavity.

What happens in an EKG?

An EKG normally takes about 5 to 10 minutes. Here's what happens during the test:

- You will need to remove your clothes from the waist up for the test. You will be covered by a sheet or gown that exposes only the necessary skin.
- You'll lie flat on a table or bed.



An **electrocardiogram** (EKG or ECG) is a simple, easy test to check your heart health. The EKG machine records your heart's activity on a printout (tracing).

- A technician will place several **electrodes** (small, sticky patches) on your chest. An electrode will also be placed on each arm and leg.
- The technician will attach a wire to each sticky patch. The wires will be connected to the EKG machine.
- The EKG machine will record your heart's electrical activity and print it on a paper record called a **tracing**. You'll need to lie still and not talk during the test. Movement or talking can interfere with the tracing.
- After about a minute, the tracing will be finished. The technician will disconnect the wires and remove the patches from your skin.

How will I get the results?

Your regular healthcare provider or a heart doctor (**cardiologist**) will review and interpret the EKG tracing. You'll get the results in a follow-up appointment, or sometimes during the same appointment.

If the EKG shows there might be a problem with your heart, you might need to have other tests or procedures. Your healthcare provider will tell you if this is the case.

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