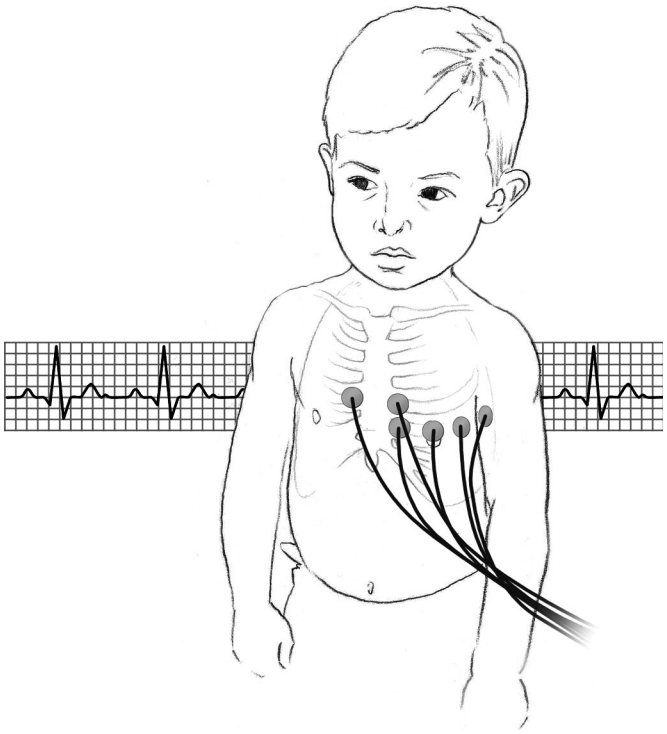
Let's Talk About...

Electrocardiogram (ECG, EKG)

An **electrocardiogram** (ee-leck-trow-CARD-ee-oh-gram) is a test that measures how the heart is working. It is also called an ECG or an EKG. It helps your healthcare provider find out if your child has an irregular heartbeat, if your child's heart is bigger than normal, or if the electrical system of the heart is working correctly. It also helps your healthcare provider know the position of the heart in the body.

The heart is the muscle that pumps blood to the body. To do this, the heart must fill with blood and then squeeze it out. The electrical system of the heart tells the heart when to beat by sending a very small electrical current through the muscle. If there is no electrical current, the heart will not beat.

An ECG is a paper print that shows the electricity moving through the heart. The technician will put "leads" (sticky patches) on your child's chest that sense the electrical current in the heart. The technician will use several leads to look at the heart from different angles. Sensitive machines detect the electrical current on the skin surface as the current passes through the heart. To help your technician place the leads correctly, it is important not to use baby oil or lotion before the test. These products do not allow the electrodes to stick properly.



What happens during an ECG?

You and your child will go into a private room with the ECG machine. You will remove your child's shirt so that painless, sticky pads can be placed on his chest. Modesty will be maintained. These pads are then connected to wires that run to the ECG machine. The technician will push the record button on the machine and the machine will print a piece of paper with wavy ECG lines. The sticky patches will be removed and your child may get dressed. The electrical recording takes one minute. The entire procedure takes less than 10 minutes. During the exam, your child may sit on your lap to be more comfortable or to help her hold still. The test is not painful. The only risk to the test is a skin allergy to the adhesive of the electrodes that may result in temporary redness and irritation of the skin where the electrodes are placed.

After the test, the ECG will be given to your healthcare provider, who will explain it to you.

What do kids say about the exam?

- It felt like nothing.
- It did not hurt.
- I have to hold very still.
- They put lots of stickers on your chest (13 of them).
- I got to help take off the stickers when the test was done.
- I took home a picture with my stickers on it if I wanted.

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