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ConsumerReportsHealth



Stress tests after a stent procedure

When you need them—and when you don't

A stent procedure is done to open a blocked artery in your heart. Sometimes people get yearly stress tests afterward to see if the blockage might happen again.

But stress tests usually aren't helpful after a stent procedure unless you have symptoms of heart disease. Here's why.

Routine stress tests usually aren't needed.

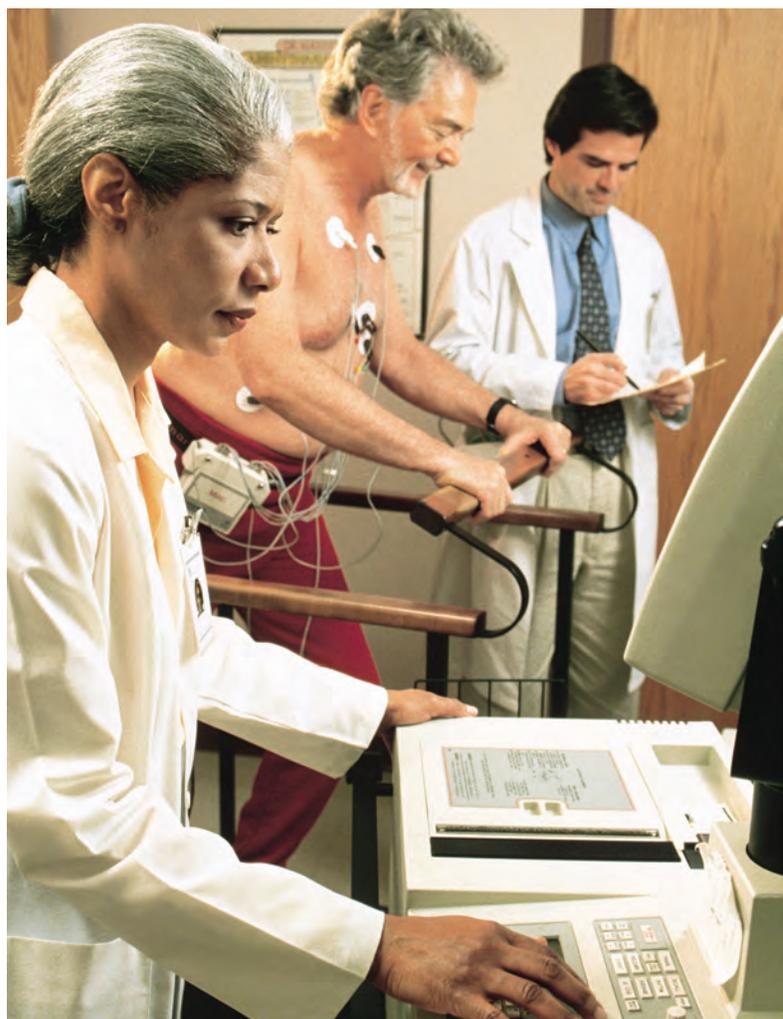
Stress tests make your heart work harder to show if it is getting enough blood during exercise.

- Some tests take pictures using sound waves (ultrasound or echocardiography).
- Other tests use a small dose of a radioactive substance (nuclear cardiology).

If you don't have symptoms, the test is unlikely to find a problem or lead to a helpful change in your treatment.

Symptoms will usually tell you if there's a problem.

Sometimes heart problems return after a stent procedure. If that happens, you usually have symptoms—like chest pain, fatigue, or shortness of breath.



If you do have symptoms, a stress test can help your doctor see what's going on. It can show if a blockage has returned or if there's a new blockage. It can also help you and your doctor decide what to do—increase your medicine or get another stent procedure.

The tests may have risks.

Stress tests are usually very safe, and some use little or no radiation. But the tests can give false alarms. These can cause unnecessary worry and anxiety. False alarms can also lead to more tests, such as coronary angiography. And these additional tests may lead to even more procedures and risks.

Stress tests can be costly.

An imaging stress test costs between \$500 and \$2,000, depending on where it's done. If you have additional tests, your costs might be higher. A coronary angiography, for example, costs \$8,460, according to [Healthcare BlueBook](#).

When do you need a stress test after a stent procedure?

You may need a stress test if:

- Your symptoms (chest pain, shortness of breath, or fatigue) come back or get worse.
- You're finding it harder to exercise or climb stairs.
- Your doctor wants to check blockages that weren't severe enough to treat when your stent was inserted. Your doctor can do this with a single test. You don't usually need yearly tests.
- You have had multiple heart procedures in the past, such as stents after a bypass surgery.

This report is for you to use when talking with your health-care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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Advice from Consumer Reports

Recovery after a heart procedure

A cardiac rehabilitation program can help you recover faster from a heart procedure. It can:

- Strengthen your heart.
- Reduce the risk of a heart attack.
- Speed your return to normal activities.
- Lower your risk of dying.

Ask your doctor to refer you to a program. A recovery program should:

- **Be accredited**, like those certified by the American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation.
- **Be close to your home**. If there's no program nearby, ask if you can go less often or get home visits.
- **Provide an initial evaluation**—with a review of your diet and exercise habits, and new blood pressure and blood sugar tests.
- **Include a supervised exercise plan** that meets your health needs.
- **Help you make a diet plan** based on your risks, tastes, and preferences.
- **Give you a case manager** to coordinate your care.

Find out what your insurance covers. If you can't join a rehab program, it's still important to follow a heart-healthy diet and an exercise plan recommended by your doctor.

