

# Heart Stress Tests



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*An initiative of the ABIM Foundation*

 **Society for  
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## Get a heart stress test before surgery— but only if you need it

**A** heart stress test measures how exercise affects your heart. If you're planning to have surgery, you may wonder if you need one of these tests to find out if you're strong enough for your surgery.

It's important to get a stress test if you need it. But many people get this test even if they don't need it.

### Who needs a heart stress test before surgery?

You may need a stress test if you have serious heart problems. These include:

- A hard time walking a short way or climbing stairs
- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain
- Heart failure that is not under control
- Severe valve disease that is not under control

Your doctor may suggest a stress test if you are getting intermediate-risk surgery. Examples of this are knee or hip replacement. She may also ask you to get a stress test if you're going to have high-risk surgery. An example of this is bypass surgery for a blocked artery in your leg.

You may need a stress test if you have kidney disease or diabetes. You may also need one if you've had coronary artery disease, heart failure, or a stroke.

### Your test results

Abnormal stress test results mean you are more likely to have a heart attack or other serious problems during surgery. You may need special care during or after surgery. Or your doctor may want to scale back or delay your surgery.

Learn more: [ConsumerHealthChoices.org/catalog/stresstest](https://www.ConsumerHealthChoices.org/catalog/stresstest)

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## Avoid false alarms

Stress tests are usually very safe. Some can be done with little or no radiation. But they sometimes lead to false alarms about your health. False alarms can be stressful and delay your surgery.

False alarms can also lead to more tests. For instance, your doctor may ask you to have a coronary angiography. In this test, your doctor puts a tube in your heart, injects dye, and takes X-rays. In most cases, this test is safe. But it can cause bleeding, a heart attack, and even death. Plus, the effects of radiation build up in your body over time. So it's best to avoid X-rays if you can.

## Paying for tests

If your health plan doesn't pay for it, you may spend between \$200 and \$2,000 for a stress test. A coronary angiography can cost another \$5,000. These costs are on top of your surgery.

This report is for you to use when talking with your healthcare provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment.

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[ConsumerHealthChoices.org/about-us](http://ConsumerHealthChoices.org/about-us).

## Advice from Consumer Reports

### Get ready for your surgery

It's a good idea to prepare for your surgery. That way, your surgery is more likely to go smoothly. Follow these tips.

#### Talk with your doctor

Your doctor or the hospital's pre-surgery team will give you an exam. They will also review your health history. This is a good time to ask any questions that you may have.

Tell your doctor about any chest pain or pressure, or trouble being active. Tell your doctor even if these problems happen after your exam.

Bring a list of the names, doses, and directions for all the medicines you take. Include prescription and over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, herbs, and supplements.

Ask what you should do to get ready for surgery, including changing any drugs you take. Ask what to expect during and after surgery. For instance, ask about nursing and rehab care.

If your doctor orders any tests, ask what they're for. And ask how likely they are to help—or harm—you.

Do not smoke on the day of your surgery. The sooner you quit, the better. For help quitting, ask about a nicotine patch.

Think about banking your blood. That means having some of your blood drawn and stored before surgery. That way, if you need a transfusion, you will get your own blood.

#### Ask for help

Ask someone to drive you to and from the hospital. And ask them to stay overnight with you.

#### Pack a bag

Here are some items you may want to bring to the hospital:

- Health plan cards
- Some items for comfort, such as a music player and headphones, photos, and a robe
- Storage boxes for dentures, contacts, and glasses

Don't bring jewelry or other costly items.