



Electrocardiogram

(ECG or EKG)

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.

What is an electrocardiogram (EKG)?

An EKG is a test that shows the electrical activity (rhythm) of your child's heart. This tells your child's doctor if the heart is beating correctly.

What should I do to help my child prepare for the test?

Usually, no preparation is needed. Your child's doctor or nurse will talk with you about more specific care for your child. Below are some general guidelines to follow:

Infants- Although you cannot explain the exam to your baby, you can help your baby feel more secure during the test by bringing a special blanket, toy, or pacifier. Please bring along a bottle of juice or formula to feed your baby when the test is done.

Toddlers and preschooler age children- Young children remember things for only a short time, so the best time to talk about the test is right before you are ready to go to the hospital. Tell your child that he will be having some special "pictures" taken of his heart. Try to use simple words. Tell your child that the test will not hurt, but that he will need to help by lying very still. Let your child know that you will be able to stay with him. When you come to the hospital, bring a favorite book, toy, or blanket. You may also bring a snack for after the test.

School-age children- School-age children have good imaginations, so being honest is important. They may actually imagine something worse than what is really going to happen. The day of the test, tell your child that he will be going to the hospital to have a special test to help his doctor know how his heart is working. Use simple words and try to tell him exactly what will happen. Tell him the test will not hurt. When you come to the hospital, bring along a favorite book, toy or game. If you wish, you may also bring along a snack for after the test.

What will the test be like?

Your child will lie on a bed with his shirt off. The EKG machine is made up of a computer with a cable and several wires attached. Electrodes (small sticky patches) are placed on your child's chest, arms and legs. (Special electrodes can be used if your child is allergic to tape.) The electrodes are then attached to the machine's wires. Your child must lie still for about a minute. Then the machine prints out a paper graph of his heartbeat. Your child will not feel anything while the machine is working. An EKG takes about 15 minutes and will not hurt your child.

It is best for one parent to stay with your child and help him during the test.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

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What happens after the test?

The electrodes will be removed from your child's skin. The technician will tell you when you may leave.

When do I get the results?

Your child's EKG record will be sent to a cardiologist (heart doctor) for review. The results will be sent to your child's doctor. Your child's doctor will call or send the test results to you.

Is any follow up care needed?

Your child's doctor will let you know when your child should be seen again.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.