



CLEAR LAKE HEART CENTER

NUCLEAR STRESS TEST QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is it ok to be around children after my exam?

You should not be around babies or small children for the rest of the day because you do have residual radiation from your exam. This is especially important if you are having a nuclear stress test.

What am I injected with?

For all nuclear medicine exams a radioactive material, also known as an isotope or tracer, is injected.

Are there any side effects from the injection?

There are no side effects or allergic reactions to the radioactive material. When a patient cannot walk well enough on the treadmill, a medication (vasodilator) is used to simulate exercise by dilating blood vessels.

Common side effects:

- headache
- flushed feeling

The cardiologist can give an "anecdotal" medication if needed.

How long will I be on the treadmill?

There is not a set time limit. You must reach 85% maximum heart rate.

Will I have to run on the treadmill?

Perhaps, but usually a fast walk is enough.

What does the treadmill show?

The cardiologist views your EKG as you are walking to see how your heart responds to physical activity; including your blood pressure and heart rate.

Who reads the results and how do I get them?

A cardiologist interprets the stress test and a nuclear medicine radiologist reads the image scan. You are able to obtain your results from your referring physician within 48-72 hours.

Why do I have to stop caffeine?

Caffeine affects your heart rate and the blood flow to your heart; it can adversely affect the image.

Are decaffeinated beverages allowed?

No. Decaffeinated beverages are not caffeine free. Various brands have different levels of caffeine, so they are not allowed.

What is a description of the testing procedure?

Rest Portion: You will be given an explanation of the test and asked to sign a consent form. A nuclear medicine technologist will start an IV in either your hand or arm. A small amount of radioactive tracer will be injected through the IV. You will be asked to wait approximately 60 minutes before imaging will occur. When imaging occurs you will be asked to lie on an imaging table with *both arms above your head*. Your chest area will be under a nuclear camera. Images of your heart will be taken with the camera as it rotates around your chest in a circular fashion. Imaging time is approximately 15 – 20 minutes.

Exercise Portion: A medical assistant or technician will place electrodes on your chest and connect wires to an EKG machine to monitor your heart rhythm. A blood pressure (BP) cuff will also be placed around your arm to monitor your blood pressure throughout the exercise portion. The treadmill will start slowly at first and will gradually increase in speed and incline. Your BP will be checked frequently and your EKG will be continually monitored. Once your heart rate reaches 85% of predicted maximum, a second injection of the radionuclide will be injected through the IV by the nuclear medicine technologist. You will be asked to continue exercise for at least one minute after the injection. Exercise as long as you can since that increases the accuracy of the test. When the exercise portion is completed, your BP and EKG will be monitored for several more minutes. You will lie under the camera for a second set of images after a wait period of 30 – 60 minutes. These images will again take approximately 15 minutes to acquire.

How long does the injection stay in my system?

The nuclear imaging agent is out of your system within 60 hours, but it is always decaying so it becomes minimal in a relatively short period of time.

What if I cannot walk on the treadmill?

There is a medication called Lexiscan that will be injected into you. This medication simulates exercise by dilating blood vessels to the heart without having to go on the treadmill.

Will I be able to drive after?

Yes.

Will I be able to go to work after?

Yes, you will be able to resume your normal activities after your exam.

Why does the nuclear stress test take so long?

There are three parts to the test, a resting scan, a stress test and a stress scan. There are waiting times between injections and the stress test.