

EKG (also known as “electrocardiogram” or “ECG”)

What is it?

A quick and easy non-invasive procedure that uses electrodes placed on your chest, arms, and legs to interpret electrical activity of the heart.

Each heartbeat is accompanied by an electrical signal that spreads from the top of the heart to the bottom. As the signal travels, it causes the heart to contract and pump blood.

EKG recordings will give the doctor information about how the heart works – the heart rate, regularity of heartbeats, size and position of the chambers of the heart, presence of any damage to the heart, and effects of drugs or devices used to regulate the heart.

EKGs can detect many heart problems:

- Lack of blood flow to the heart muscle (coronary heart disease)
- An irregular heartbeat (arrhythmias)
- A heart that doesn't pump forcefully enough (heart failure)
- Heart muscles that are too thick (cardiomyopathy)
- Birth defects (congenital heart defects)
- Problems with heart valves (heart valve disease)
- Inflammation of the sac surrounding the heart (pericarditis)

Who needs it?

An EKG is done routinely at most cardiology offices to detect and monitor various heart diseases.

An EKG is also recommended if you have the following signs and symptoms:

- Chest pain
- Irregular heart beat (feelings of pounding, racing, fluttering)
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness and weakness

What to expect before, during, and after?

BEFORE	You do not need to do anything before the test but make sure to tell your doctor about any medications you are taking as they may affect your heart.
DURING	During the test, you will be asked to lie on your back on an exam table. A health care personnel will attach soft, sticky patches (electrodes) to your skin that will help record your heart's electrical signals. At times, the nurse or technician may shave areas of your skin to allow the patches to stick on better.
AFTER	After the EKG is complete, the nurse will remove the electrodes. Because of the sticky nature of the electrodes, you may develop a bit of redness or irritation but this is usually extremely mild and returns to normal on its own. Your doctor will explain the EKG findings to you.

Are there any risks I should be aware of?

Aside from a minor rash, there are no other risks involved with EKGs.

