Patient Instructions

Before the Procedure:

- Avoid taking anything with caffeine for 24 hours before the test, including: coffee or tea (even decaffeinated), chocolate, or sodas. Medications that contain caffeine should also be held for 24 hours. Some over-the-counter medications that contain caffeine include Anacin, Excedrin, and NoDoz. Theophylline medications should be stopped 48 hours prior to the test. Consult your physician for specific instructions.
- Fasting (No food or liquids) is required for 4 hours before the procedure.
- If you are diabetic, please consult your physician for special instruction on when to take your diabetes medications.
- Do not apply any creams, lotions, or powder to your chest area on the day of your test.
- The procedure will be explained to you and you will have the opportunity to ask any questions that you might have about the procedure.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form that gives your permission to perform the test. Read the form carefully and ask questions if something is not clear.
- If you are pregnant or suspect that you may be pregnant, you must notify the staff.
- Notify the staff of all medications (prescription and over-the-counter) and herbal supplements that you are taking.
- Notify the staff if you have a pacemaker or defibrillator.
- Please wear comfortable clothing as well as a pair of comfortable walking shoes or sneakers.
- Based upon your medical condition, your physician may request other specific preparation

Risks:

A nuclear stress test is generally safe, and complications are rare. As with any medical procedure, there is a risk of complications, including:

- **Allergic reaction.** Though rare, you could be allergic to the radioactive dye that's injected during a nuclear stress test.
- **Abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias).** Arrhythmias brought on during a stress test usually go away shortly after you stop exercising or the medication wears off. Life-threatening arrhythmias are rare.
- **Heart attack (myocardial infarction).** Although extremely rare, it's possible that a nuclear stress test could cause a heart attack.
- **Dizziness or chest pain.** These symptoms can occur during a stress test. Other possible signs and symptoms include nausea, shakiness, headache, flushing, shortness of breath and anxiety. These signs and symptoms are usually mild and brief, but tell your doctor if they occur.
- **Low blood pressure.** Blood pressure may drop during or immediately after exercise, possibly causing you to feel dizzy or faint. The problem should go away after you stop exercising.

If you experience any symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness or severe fatigue at any point during the procedure, let the physician, nurse or technologist know.
What to Expect

Before the Testing Begins:

Before the test starts, a technician inserts an intravenous (IV) line into your arm. In addition to placing an IV, a nurse or technician will place sticky patches (electrodes) on your chest and a blood pressure cuff on your arm. For male patients, some areas of your chest may need to be shaved to help the electrodes stick throughout the exercise portion of the testing. The electrodes will have wires connected to an electrocardiogram machine which records the electrical signals that trigger the heartbeats. The blood pressure cuff that is placed on your arm checks blood pressure throughout the test.

30 minutes prior to your initial resting images radiopharmaceutical tracers will be injected. The radiotracer may feel cold when it’s first injected which is normal. In about 30 minutes your heart cells will have absorbed the radiotracer and you will be ready for the first round of “resting images”.

What to expect during a Nuclear Stress Test with Exercise:

Once resting images are captured you will be required to exercise by either walking on treadmill or by riding a stationary bike. The intensity of the exercise will gradually increase by increasing the speed and incline of the treadmill or speed and resistance on the stationary bike. Once you have reached your set target heart rate (determined by your heart rate and age) a second radionuclide will be injected through your intravenous catheter (IV). After the radionuclide has been injected, you will continue to exercising for one to two minutes to allow the radionuclide to circulate through your heart. The treadmill is then slowed down and stopped and you will sit back into the camera for “stress images”.

What happens if you are unable to perform the physical portion of the test?

You will not exercise on a treadmill. Instead, a stress agent drug is injected into your IV that will mimic exercise by increasing blood flow to the heart. “Stress images” will be captured once your target heart rate is acquired.

Also note, possible side effects may be similar to those caused by exercise, such as flushing or shortness of breath and in some cases patients may get a headache.

What to expect during the imaging procedure?

If you’ve talked to anyone prior to this test some will tell you they laid down in a machine during the imaging part of the test. Our camera allows you to sit normally in the while the images of your heart are obtained. If possible, your arms will be elevated slightly above your shoulders placing them on a cushioned arm rest. It will be necessary for you to sit very still while the images are being recorded, as movement can adversely affect the quality of the images. After both the rest and stress scans have been completed and processed, you will be informed that you are finished with the test.