

Mayo Clinic Minute: What's a cardiac stress test?

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Your heart provides blood to all parts of your body. In order to determine if it's pumping properly, your health care provider may order a cardiac stress test. It makes the heart pump harder and faster, and can reveal potential problems with blood flow.

Stressing the [heart](#) might not sound like a safe thing for someone with a cardiovascular condition, but a cardiac stress test is an important tool for doctors.

"We get information about the pumping function of the heart and specifically about the vessels which supply the [blood flow](#) to the heart, whether or not there are significant blockages," says Dr. Paul McKie, a Mayo Clinic cardiologist.

There are two types of cardiac stress tests.

"The most common and the preferred approach is to exercise. So a patient may walk on a treadmill, they may exercise on a bike," says Dr. McKie.

That takes less than 10 minutes, and heart rhythm, blood pressure and breathing are monitored. If a person has a blockage, often there is enough blood flow around the blockage at rest.

"It's only with exercise—when there's more demands on the heart—can they not get enough blood flow around the blockage," says Dr. McKie.

If you're not able to exercise, the other type of test is the use of medication to simulate the effects of exercise on the heart. Your doctor may order a cardiac stress test to diagnose [coronary artery disease](#) and heart arrhythmias. It also can determine treatments if you've already

been diagnosed with a heart condition.

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