

ECG (Electrocardiogram)

What is an ECG?

An ECG (or 'electrocardiogram') records the electrical activity of the heart: electrical impulses are produced by the heart, which then cause it to contract to pump blood around the body. An ECG may be done to investigate chest pains, shortness of breath, or palpitations; sometimes it is also done as part of a routine check up for high blood pressure, or pre-operatively.

It is painless and harmless.

What do I need to know about attending for an ECG appointment?

The appointment is for 20 minutes with the nurse. You will have stickers put on your chest, arms and legs so you need to come ready to undress to your waist (including removing bras, ladies), and expose the skin on your feet (so try and avoid wearing tights). Please ensure you use no oils or lotions on your skin; and, if necessary, be prepared to have your chest shaved if it is hairy, gentlemen (or do it yourself beforehand), as we need to ensure the electrode stickers have good contact with your skin.

What happens in the appointment?

The nurse will ask if you are experiencing any chest pain, palpitations or shortness of breath. You will then get undressed as above, and have stickers placed on your chest and limbs. The nurse will then record the ECG – you will not feel a thing. Finally, the nurse may go and check with a doctor the recording is acceptable – the nurses and doctors do not interpret the ECG straight away however.

What happens afterwards?

The ECG is given to a doctor in the practice who can interpret the reading obtained – this will be done in the following few days. If there is anything further we need to discuss with you, you will be contacted to come in if you do not already have an appointment booked.

The ECG is a simple and very useful test, but it does have its limitations. It does not necessarily rule out serious heart disease, and, therefore, your doctor may consider referring you for further tests if they are worried about your heart.