

HOLTER ELECTROCARDIOGRAM (EKG OR ECG)



What is it?

A Holter Electrocardiogram—often referred to as Holter EKG or ECG—is a test that measures the electrical activity of the heart for a prolonged period of time, typically 24 or 48 hours, on an outpatient basis. Holter differs from a resting ECG in that a resting ECG records a very small portion of your heart's activity, less than one quarter of one percent of your daily heartbeats. The resting ECG is taken while you are at rest and, therefore, does not show how your heart will react to normal daily life. By measuring the time intervals of this wave, a doctor can determine how long a wave takes to travel from one part of the heart to the next, thereby determining if the electrical activity is normal or slow, fast or irregular.

Why is a Holter done?

Cardiovascular disease is the nation's leading cause of death for both men and women. The American Heart Association claims that cardiovascular disease accounts for more deaths than any other cause of death in the United States every year since 1900, excluding 1918.

A Holter ECG provides physicians with evidence of transient cardiac problems—that is, problems that come and go, and are not apparent when a standard ECG is performed. These problems could be cardiac arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms) or cardiac ischemia (decreased blood flow to heart muscles). A Holter may also be prescribed to monitor patients following heart attacks, surgery, or to assess a pacemakers' functionality.

How is it done?

A Holter ECG is a simple, painless procedure. Monitoring electrodes will be placed on the chest and torso. Usually, the electrodes are soft and don't cause any discomfort when they're put on or taken off by the technician. These electrodes will pick up the signals from your heart and transfer them to a portable recorder. You will be asked to wear this small device for the time prescribed by your doctor. The recorder can be affixed with a belt or straps that the technician will provide and can be concealed with your shirt or blouse. The recording will later be transformed into a report which your doctor will analyze.

Dos and Dont's

The recorder you will be wearing should not interfere with your normal routine, however there are a few restrictions. Obviously you should not tamper with the recorder, electrodes, or lead wires. You should not take a shower or bath, or get the electrodes or recorder wet in any way. Record all activities, time of activity and symptoms in the Patient Activity Chart.

When a test is complete, you will return to the doctor's office. The doctor will remove the recorder and electrodes and take the diary from you. He will then process the recording and generate a report highlighting various portions of it. Your doctor will use this information along with your past medical history and results from other tests. He can then make the most accurate diagnosis of your condition and provide the best medical care possible.