ECGs (ELECTROCARDIOGRAMS)

THE PROBLEM

An ECG records the electrical activity of your heart at rest. It provides information about your heart rate and rhythm, and shows if there is enlargement of the heart due to high blood pressure (hypertension) or evidence of a previous heart attack (myocardial infarction).

THE RISKS

The ECG will not harm you. However, it can sometimes show mild nonspecific abnormalities that are not due to underlying heart disease, but cause worry and lead to follow-up tests and treatments that you do not need.

WHEN TO CONSIDER THE TESTS

You may need an ECG test if you have risk factors for heart disease such as high blood pressure, or symptoms such as palpitations or chest pain. Or you may need it if you already have heart disease.

ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

Do I really need to have this test, treatment or procedure?
The answer should be direct and simple. Tests should help you and your health professional decide how to treat your problem, and treatments and procedures should help you live a longer, healthier life.

What are the risks (of having or not having it)?
Discuss the risks as well as the chance of inaccurate results or findings that will never cause symptoms, but may require further testing. Weigh the potential complications against possible benefits and the symptoms of the condition itself.

Are there simpler, safer options?
Sometimes lifestyle changes will provide all the relief you need.

What happens if I do nothing?
Ask your health professional if your condition might worsen—or get better—if you don't have the test or treatment now.

There may be tests, treatments and procedures you think you need, but you don't. Let's think again. Engage in a conversation with your health professional today.