

# ELECTROCARDIOGRAM (ECG)

## PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

The ECG test is painless and does not involve the use of needles in any way. It records electrical impulses coming from your body – it does NOT put any electricity into your body.

### WHAT IS AN ECG?

An electrocardiogram (ECG) is a graph of your heart's electrical activity. The heart produces tiny electrical impulses which spread through the heart muscle to make the heart contract. These impulses can be detected by the ECG machine. You may have an ECG to help find the cause of symptoms such as palpitations or chest pain. Sometimes it is done as part of routine tests – for example, before you have an operation.

### WHAT DOES IT SHOW?

An ECG can show if you:

- Are having, or have had a heart attack
- Have a stressed heart muscle
- Have irregular heart rhythms
- Have inflammation of the heart lining
- Have abnormal electrical pathways

### HOW IS IT DONE?

Small sticky electrodes are stuck on to your wrists, ankles, and chest area. The leads from the ECG machine are then connected to the electrodes. You will be asked to lay still, and not to talk for a few minutes whilst it detects and amplifies your electrical impulses that occur at each heartbeat and records them on to the computer. The test takes about 5-10 minutes to do. The results of your ECG will be interpreted by your doctor.

#### **THINGS TO KNOW:**

- **To stick the electrodes onto your chest, you will need to remove all your upper clothing, including t-shirts, singlets, jumpers, jackets, and bras.**
- **You may need to have your chest hair shaved or skin cleaned so the electrodes will stick properly to your skin.**
- **To stick the electrodes onto your ankles, you will need to roll down long socks or remove tights and stockings.**
- **A pacemaker does not prevent the test from being performed, but it is important to tell the doctor or nurse if you have one as it will give different results.**

