

Featuring Dr. Graham Wong, MD, MPH, FRCPC, FACC, Acute Cardiac Care, Cardiologist

Duration: 1 minute, 45 seconds

A Holter monitor is a rhythm test, in which we are trying to understand the rhythms of the heart over a 24-hour monitoring period. A Holter monitor is worn by an individual, and the Holter monitor consists of a battery pack, a little computer with a little hard drive, as well as electrode leads that the patient has to put on themselves. The Holter monitor is only effective if the leads are actually worn.

After a 24-hour period, all of the heartbeats that are generated by the patient wearing the holter monitor are captured inside the head unit of the Holter monitor. And when it's returned to the institution that the Holter monitor was picked up from, the information is downloaded and then interpreted.

What a Holter monitor will give you is all of the heartbeats that were generated from the person over that period of time, and we can get a sense of the range of the heartbeats, what the average heartbeat was and if there are any extra heartbeats—whether they are coming from the upper or lower chamber of the heart.

This test is used when there is a suspicion of the electrical sub-system of the heart that may cause rhythm problems; either rhythm problems that generate overly quick heart rhythms, or tachyarrhythmias, or overly slow rhythms such as bradyarrhythmias. And so these would be useful in patients who complain of palpitations or other symptoms which would suggest that there are abnormalities with the rhythm of the heart.

If you have any symptoms that are worrisome for a rhythm abnormality, you may want to speak to your family physician to see if a Holter monitor is something that would be useful in trying to figure out what your symptoms are due to.