

Echocardiogram



CARDIAC HEALTH
RESOURCES
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WHAT IS AN ECHOCARDIOGRAM?

An echocardiogram uses sound waves to form a picture of the heart. It gives your doctor information about your heart chamber size, heart wall motion, valve movements, blood flow, and heart structure. An echocardiogram is sometimes called an “echo test.” It can help your doctor determine if you have difficulty with your valves, find out how your heart is working, and see the movement within your heart. The test can also show heart problems that have been present since birth.

HOW IS AN ECHOCARDIOGRAM PERFORMED?

An echocardiogram is a simple and painless procedure. It takes about 45 minutes. You will be awake during the test. Here is what happens during an echocardiogram:

Step #1: You will be asked to lie still on your left side or your back.

Step #2: A trained technician will place small pads called “electrodes” on your chest to measure the electrical activity of your heart.

Step #3: The technician will put a small amount of special gel on your chest near your breastbone. The gel may feel cool.

Step #4: The technician will then put a small instrument called a transducer (a machine that measures sound) directly on your chest and the gel. He or she will move the transducer back and forth in order to create pictures of different parts of your heart.

Step #5: You may be asked to breathe in a certain way, hold your breath, or to inhale a medication that will dilate your blood vessels.

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Step #6: The transducer sends out high-frequency sound waves that are reflected by the heart.

Step #7: The transducer measures these wave “echoes” and transmits them to a machine called an oscilloscope. This machine records the wave measurements and converts them into a picture.

Step #8: The transducer may be moved to different positions on your chest to measure different areas of your heart.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR THE TEST?

You do not need to do anything special to prepare for the test.

WHAT DO THE TEST RESULTS MEAN?

A normal test result means that the heart is functioning properly. An abnormal result may indicate heart valve disease or other problems with heart function. Your doctor will discuss the test results with you.

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