

About Echocardiography

An Echocardiogram (Echo) or Echocardiography is the term given to the ultrasound examination of your heart. It is a test in which high frequency sound waves are used to create a moving picture of your heart to detect structure and function of the heart.

Why is an Echocardiogram done?

You may be asked to have an Echo for many different reasons. It may be done to show how efficiently your valves are moving inside your heart, or to check how well your heart is functioning after having a heart attack. An Echo is also able to see any fluid that may have built up surrounding the heart.

Preparation

No particular preparation is required for the test.

How is the test performed?

A trained and accredited Cardiac Sonographer will be performing the test. An instrument (transducer) that transmits and receives high frequency sound waves will be placed in various positions on your chest. These different positions allow the sonographer to examine the entire heart from multiple angles and directions. The transducer picks up the echoes of the sound waves and transmits them as electrical impulses. The echocardiography machine then converts these impulses into moving pictures.

What should I expect?

You will be required to be bare chested but will also be given a front opening gown to wear and then lie down on an examination table. ECG electrodes will be placed on your chest and then you will be asked to roll onto your left hand side. The transducer will be placed on your chest to take the pictures.

Ultrasound gel is used to improve contact and imaging quality. The transducer (see picture above) will be applied firmly against the chest wall to obtain the pictures, the Sonographer will ask you if this causes discomfort. A number of sites are utilised: the left side of the chest adjacent to the sternum (breast bone), the area under the left breast, the upper abdomen and the base of the neck. You may hear noises that sound a bit like a washing machine, this represent the magnified ultrasound signal of blood flowing through the heart chambers and valves and is completely normal. The scanning time will be approximately 40 minutes and may vary depending on the findings.

You will at times be asked to take a deep breath in, or to hold a breath out, this will only last approximately 5 seconds at time. The Sonographer will guide you through this at the time.

Once finished you will be given a towel to wipe off any gel that you may still have on your chest and to redress. There are showers available at most sites if you require one.

Results

A report will be generated from your images by the Cardiologist and the Sonographer, this will then go to your referring Doctor electronically, usually the same day or overnight if done late in the afternoon. You should contact your referring Doctor for your results and any follow up required.