

Echocardiogram

Definition

An echocardiogram is a test that uses sound waves to create pictures of the heart. The picture and information it create is more detailed than a standard x-ray image. An echocardiogram does not expose you to radiation.

How the Test is Performed

An echo uses sound waves to create pictures of your heart's chambers, valves, walls and the blood vessels (aorta, arteries, veins) attached to your heart.

A probe called a transducer is passed over your chest. The probe produces sound waves that bounce off your heart and "echo" back to the probe. These waves are changed into pictures viewed on a video monitor.

How to Prepare for the Test

You don't have to do anything special. You can eat and drink before the test like you usually would.

How the Test will Feel

Echo tests are done by specially trained technicians. You may have your test done in your doctor's office, an emergency room, an operating room, a hospital clinic or a hospital room. The test takes about an hour.

- You lie on a table and a technician places small metal disks (electrodes) on your chest. The disks have wires that hook to an electrocardiograph machine. An electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG) keeps track of your heartbeat during your test.
- The room is dark so your technician can better see the video monitor.
- Your technician puts gel on your chest to help sound waves pass through your skin.
- Your technician may ask you to move or hold your breath briefly to get better pictures.
- The probe (transducer) is passed across your chest. The probe produces sound waves that bounce off your heart and "echo" back to the probe.
- The sound waves are change into pictures and displayed on a video monitor. The pictures on the video monitor are recorded so your doctor can look at them later.

Considerations

This test is used to evaluate and monitor many different heart conditions.

Abnormal results may indicate:

- Heart valve disease
- Pericardial effusion
- Cardiomyopathy
- Other heart abnormalities

How Long will Test Last

Most of the time, the test will last less than 30 minutes.

