

Cardiology: Echocardiogram

Introduction

An echocardiogram, or "echo", is a scan used to look at the heart and nearby blood vessels. It's a type of ultrasound scan, which means a small probe is used to send out high-frequency sound waves that create echoes when they bounce off different parts of the body.

An echocardiogram can help diagnose and monitor certain heart conditions by checking the structure of the heart and surrounding blood vessels, analysing how blood flows through them, and assessing the pumping chambers of the heart.

This is a non-invasive diagnostic test that can be performed at an outpatient appointment.

There are also several other types of echocardiogram that can be carried out:

- a transoesophageal echocardiogram (TOE) – where a small probe is passed down the throat into your food pipe (oesophagus) and sometimes into your stomach (your throat will be numbed with local anaesthetic spray and you'll be given a sedative to help you relax); you may need to avoid eating for several hours before this test
- a stress echocardiogram – a TTE, but carried out during or just after a period of exercise on a treadmill or exercise bike, or after being given an injection of a medication that makes your heart work harder
- a contrast echocardiogram – where a harmless substance called a contrast agent is injected into your bloodstream before an echocardiogram is carried out; this substance shows up clearly on the scan and can help create a better image of your heart

The type of echocardiogram you will have depends on the heart condition being assessed and how detailed the images need to be.

Guidance for Patients

You will be given some additional patient information before and after the procedure, for example leaflets that explain what to do after the procedure and what problems to look out for. If you have any questions or anxieties, please feel free to ask a member of staff on 01223 256233.

Further information is also available on the British Heart Foundation website: www.bhf.org.uk

How you can support yourself while you wait for your procedure

There are things you can do whilst you wait for your procedure to make you sure you are as healthy and strong as you can be. This will increase your chances of a better recovery. In the time leading up to your procedure, be sure to take good care of yourself by taking a few smart steps. This can help you avoid complications. Follow these simple tips to ensure the best possible outcome and prepare for a successful recovery.

Take Your Medication

You will be advised to continue with your normal medications, but you may be advised to stop some medications before your procedure, your clinician or pre-operative nurse will provide you with this information.

Improve Your Health

- Stick to healthy foods - Your body needs good nutrition to fight infection and heal following your procedure.
- Avoid dehydration - drink at least six-eight glasses of fluid per day, preferably water.

Alcohol

Alcohol can have many effects on your body but importantly it can reduce your body's ability to heal. Make sure you are drinking within the recommended limits or lower to improve your ability to heal after your procedure.

Prevention of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) or Pulmonary Embolism (PE) before procedure

There are natural ways and lifestyle changes you can make to lower your risk of developing blood clots, these include:-

- Staying active: make a point of moving every 30-60 minutes to ensure you keep your blood flowing
- Regular exercise – simply walking for 30 minutes a day is a great way to keep your circulation moving
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Keep hydrated.

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

If you feel that there is a change in your condition, please contact your Clinical Team, via switchboard (01223 245 151)

Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can also visit www.nhs.uk

Life Threatening Emergencies

For something life threatening – severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains – please dial 999.

Contact Us

Please call Cardiology Diagnostics on telephone number 01223 216990 if you have any questions or concerns about this procedure or your appointment.