My Planned Care Patient Information Platform

NHS
Walsall
Healthcare NHS Trust

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.

These echoes are picked up by the probe and turned into a moving image on a monitor while the scan is carried out.

An echocardiogram may be requested by a heart specialist (cardiologist) or any doctor who thinks you might have a problem with your heart, including your GP.

The test will usually be carried out at a hospital or clinic by a cardiologist or a trained specialist called a cardiac physiologist.

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine elective services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always possible to identify when treatment will take place. This document provides you with information on how you can support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital.

Guidance for Patients

There are several different ways an echocardiogram can be carried out, but most people will have a transthoracic echocardiogram (TTE). This procedure is outlined below.

You won't usually need to do anything to prepare for the test.

For a TTE, you'll be asked to remove any clothing covering your upper half before lying down on a bed. You may be offered a hospital gown to cover yourself during the test.

When you're lying down, several small sticky sensors called electrodes will be attached to your chest. These will be connected to a machine that monitors your heart rhythm during the test.

A lubricating gel will be applied to your chest or directly to the ultrasound probe. You'll be asked to lie on your left side and the probe will be moved across your chest.

The probe is attached by a cable to a nearby machine that will display and record the images produced.

You will not hear the sound waves produced by the probe, but you may hear a swishing noise during the scan. This is normal and is just the sound of the blood flow through your heart being picked up by the probe.

The whole procedure will usually take between 15 and 60 minutes, and you'll normally be able to go home shortly afterwards.

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It is important that while you are waiting for your surgery you remain as active and as medically fit as possible. If you have any long-standing conditions such high blood pressure you should get this reviewed at your GP surgery to make sure it remains well controlled. This will also help prevent any unnecessary delays when you come for your pre-operative assessment. Maintaining a well-balanced diet is also important, as is reducing any excessive weight that may be impacting on your general health. If you are a current smoker it would be advisable to seek support to help with stopping, advice can be found at your local pharmacy or Doctor's surgery.

Find out your BMI

Follow this link to the NHS BMI Calculator

BMI of 25+

If you have a Body Mass Index of 25 or higher the Better Health Let's Do This – Lose Weight website provides online support to help you lose weight and includes access to the NHS 12 week weight loss plan.

The NHS 12 week fitness plan will support your weight loss plan as well as improve your health. This is aimed at beginners and will help get you into the habit of regular exercise over the course of the programme. It is structured but flexible enough to allow you to fit the exercise sessions around your other weekly commitments.

Information and advice on healthy eating and becoming more active is available from:

- One You Eat Better (website) - includes Easy Meals app for healthy meals and the Change4Life Food Scanner to help reduce levels of sugar in your diet

- Better Health - Get Active (website) - includes tips on getting active for all, including the downloadable Active 10 app, as well as tailored advice for those living with a long-term condition.

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

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. You can also visit www.nhs.uk. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Life Threatening Emergencies

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

GP surgeries are still open

GP practice staff are also helping patients to manage their conditions at home while they wait for hospital appointments. GP surgeries are still open and are working differently to how they did before the COVID-19 pandemic and GP practices continue to make best use of telephone, online and video consultations. Face-to-face appointments are still being given to those who need it. When you phone or use an online form to contact your GP surgery to make an appointment, you will be asked some questions which are designed to help staff guide you to the most appropriate clinical person to help you with your condition. This could be a nurse, clinical pharmacist, physician's associate, GP or paramedic.