

Echocardiogram

General Information

An echocardiogram, or echo, is an ultrasound study of your heart muscle, heart valves and pericardium (the sac surrounding your heart).

This painless test uses sound waves to see how well your heart is working.

A wand-like instrument makes the sound waves. As the ultrasound wand is moved over your chest, pictures of your heart appear on a screen and are recorded on videotape.

The test takes about 30 to 45 minutes.

Before the Test

- You may eat and drink as usual.
- Take your usual medicines.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing (slacks and a top).
- Tell the technician if you are pregnant.

During the Test

- You will undress to your waist and be given a gown to wear.
- A technician will put electrocardiogram (EKG) patches on your chest to monitor your heartbeat.
- You will lie on your left side on an exam table.
- The exam room will be darkened to help the technician see the screen on the ultrasound machine.
- The technician will put gel on the ultrasound wand before putting it on your chest.

- The wand will be moved to different places on your chest to take a variety of pictures of your heart.

If you are having an echocardiogram with bubble study:

- A nurse will also insert an intravenous (IV) line in your arm.
- A salt water solution (saline) will be injected into the IV line.
- The ultrasound will take pictures of the saline as it flows through your heart.

If you are having an echocardiogram with contrast:

- This procedure is done only if the ultrasound pictures of your heart are unclear.
- A nurse will take a brief medical history.
- The nurse will insert an intravenous (IV) line in your arm.
- A contrast solution will be injected into the IV line one or more times during a second echo procedure.

After the Test

- If an IV was started (echocardiogram with contrast) as an outpatient, the nurse will remove the IV catheter from your arm and put on a bandage.
- Your doctor will talk with you about your test results.
- You may return to your normal activities.