

Echocardiogram

What is it?

An echocardiogram, also called an echo or heart ultrasound is a test that takes “moving pictures” of the heart with sound waves. The doctor may use an echo to look at your heart’s structure and check how well your heart is working.

Why is it done?

This test may be required if...

You have a heart murmur.

You’ve had a heart attack.

You have unexplained chest pains, shortness of breath, dizziness or leg swelling.

You have had a valve replacement.

You have hypertension.

You’ve had rheumatic fever.

You have a congenital heart defect.

What to expect?

Echocardiograms are performed by trained sonographers. You will be required to lie on a bed on your left side or on your back. The sonographer will place gel on a probe and move it over your chest area. Ultra-high frequency sound waves will display images of your heart and valves. Your heart’s movements can be seen on a screen in real time. The test normally takes approximately 20-40 minutes.

What can the test show?

The size and shape of your heart

How well your heart is working overall (that is how well it contracts and how well it relaxes)

If a wall or section of heart muscle is weak and not working correctly

If you have problems with your heart’s valves

If you have a blood clot or fluid around your heart