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Echocardiogram

An echocardiogram is a test that uses sound waves (ultrasound) to create a moving picture of the heart. The picture shows the structure and function of the heart. It involves no radiation exposure.

How the test is performed

A trained sonographer (ultrasound technologist) performs the test and a heart doctor interprets the results.

Electrodes (small conducting patches) are stuck onto your chest so the equipment can record your heart rate and rhythm. An instrument called a transducer that releases high-frequency sound waves is placed on your ribs near the breast bone and directed toward the heart. Other images will be taken from other locations on your chest.

Pictures seen on the screen may be black and white or colour depending on the part of the heart being evaluated.

Doppler imaging is used to record the motion of blood through the heart and may make sounds for the sonographer to use to improve the quality of the recording.

An echocardiogram allows doctors to see the heart beating, to see the heart valves and other structures of the heart.

How to Prepare for the Test

There is no special preparation required for this test.

How the Test Will Feel

This should be a painless test for most patients. The transducer on the chest may feel slightly uncomfortable for some patients.



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Why the Test is Performed

An echocardiogram may be performed for further evaluation of signs or symptoms that may suggest:

- Heart attack or stroke
- Palpitations
- Heart murmur
- Shortness of breath
- Decreased heart function
- High blood pressure
- Congenital heart disease
- Infections or inflammations involving the heart

There may be other reasons why your health care provider asks for this test.