

CARDIAC TESTS: ECHOCARDIOGRAM

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is an echocardiogram?

An echocardiogram (or “echo”) is a test that uses sound waves to take pictures of the heart. A specially trained technician places a small, plastic microphone-like device against the chest. This device sends ultrasound waves that bounce off different parts of the heart and create an image of your heart on a computer screen. An echocardiogram can help your physician diagnose problems with your heart and heart valves and plan your treatment.

What do I need to do to prepare for an echocardiogram?

No special preparation is required, unless recommended specifically by your physician.

How is an echocardiogram performed?

Specially trained technicians will perform the echocardiogram.

- This test takes about a half-hour or longer to complete, depending on the type of echo and the number of views that your physician orders. This test has no side effects and does not hurt.
- Small pads called electrodes are placed on your chest and shoulders to monitor your heartbeat.
- You will be asked to lie on your back. During an echo, you may be asked to change your position and/or to exhale for a few seconds.
- A small amount of cool, colorless gel is placed on your chest to improve the quality of the images. The microphone-like device (or transducer) then glides over the gel and takes the image/picture.
- The images are recorded on videotape or printed out and evaluated by your physician.

What is a “doppler echo”?

A doppler echo is a special kind of echo that allows your physician to see the flow of blood through your heart. The computer may make a swooshing or pulsating sound during the test.

What is an “exercise echo”?

An exercise echo is a special kind of echo that allows your physician to see how the heart functions before and after exercise.

- Generally an initial echo is performed before exercise.
- Next you will be asked to walk on a treadmill for a few minutes or you will be given medication to simulate the effect of exercise on the body.
- A follow-up echo is then completed immediately after the exercise while your heart is beating rapidly.

If you have any additional questions about your echocardiogram, please ask your nurse or physician.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education.