



Having a transthoracic echocardiogram

Your doctor has referred you for a transthoracic echocardiogram. This leaflet explains what it does and how it is carried out.

What is a transthoracic echocardiogram?

- An echocardiogram or 'echo' is a scan that uses ultrasound (sound waves) to produce pictures of the heart. Transthoracic means 'via the chest' but the probe may be passed over different locations on the chest or abdominal wall.
- The test is usually painless and without side effects. It does not use radioactivity. Some patients may find the pressure of the ultrasound probe uncomfortable, please do let us know if this is the case and we will try and adjust the positioning and pressure of the ultrasound probe accordingly.

Why is it being done?

- An echocardiogram gives your doctor information about whether your heart muscle is pumping normally and whether your heart valves are working properly.

What does it involve?

- You will be taken into a darkened room.
- The person performing the study is called a sonographer, who may be male or female. The sonographer will usually **not** be a doctor. This means that you will usually not be given the result of the echo immediately. A report will be sent to your referring clinician, who will communicate the result to you.
- If you prefer your echo to be done by either a female or male member of staff, please let us know as soon as possible; we will try and accommodate your preference if at all possible.
- The Cardiology Department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital is a busy teaching department, so you may have your echo performed by a member of staff in training (either a sonographer or a doctor). All trainees are fully supervised. If you would prefer not to have your echo performed by a trainee, please let us know.
- To be able to perform the scan, you will need to undress to the waist. You will be given privacy to do so and a gown will be provided; this should be left open to the front. The study is performed while you are lying on a couch on your left side.
- If you require a chaperone, you may bring a friend or relative. Alternatively, the hospital can provide a chaperone at your request.
- ECG-stickers will be attached to your chest and connected to the machine. These will be used to monitor your heart rate during the test.
- An ultrasound probe covered by a small amount of gel will be placed on the centre of your chest and will be moved to different positions – beneath the left breast, beneath the rib cage

and to the base of your neck. This provides images of your heart from a number of different angles, which will be recorded. In some cases, the heart can be quite difficult to image, please try to remain as still as possible while the sonographer gathers the information required.

- During the echocardiogram, you will hear sounds coming from the machine, which represent blood flow through the heart.
- The length of the study itself will depend on the clinical question and complexity, but is usually between 10-20 minutes.

Are there any special precautions that I need to take beforehand?

- No. You can take all your medication as normal. You can eat and drink as normal.

At the end of your echocardiogram

- Once the procedure is complete you can get dressed and leave. There are no limitations to what you can do after the scan, for example, you may drive.
- The sonographer performing the scan will let you know how and when you will be given the results.

Useful contacts

Cardiac Reception Enquiries

0118 322 6515

Clinical Admin Team (CAT 11) (bookings): 0118 322 6676 (Mon - Fri, 8am - 5pm)

British Heart Foundation:

www.bhf.org.uk/heart-health/tests/echocardiogram.aspx

This leaflet is printed privately for the Cardiac Fund. It was set up in 1976 for the purpose of providing cardiac services that would otherwise not be available through National Health resources. Our Cardiac Laboratory was largely equipped through the fund and many other areas in the Department have also benefited from equipment and staff training.



If you would like to contribute please scan the QR code below to donate direct to the fund online, alternatively, cheques should be made payable to:

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