

Having a transthoracic echocardiogram

Your doctor has decided that you should have an echocardiogram. This leaflet explains what it does and how it is carried out.

What is it?

- ♥ An echocardiogram or 'echo' is a scan that uses ultrasound (sound waves) to produce pictures of the heart.
- ♥ The test is usually painless and without side effects. It does not use radioactivity. Some patients (particularly female patients or patients who are overweight) may find the pressure of the ultrasound probe uncomfortable. This may be unavoidable but please let us know if you find the examination painful.

Why is it being done?

- ♥ An echocardiogram gives your doctor information about how well the heart pumps and whether your heart valves are working properly. It is not able to tell your doctor whether you have angina and it is not used to image the coronary arteries.

What does it involve?

- ♥ You will be taken into a darkened room. The person performing the test is called a sonographer, who may be male or female. The sonographer will usually NOT be a doctor. This means that you will not be given the results of the echo immediately but will have to wait until you see the doctor in clinic. Sometimes the referring doctor will write to you with the results of the echo.
- ♥ If you would prefer your echo to be done by a female (or male) member of staff please let us know as soon as possible; we will endeavour to accommodate your preference but we are unable to guarantee this.
- ♥ The Cardiology Department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital is a busy teaching department so it is possible that 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.
- ♥ You will be asked to undress to the waist and put on a gown that should be left open to the front. You will be asked to lie on a couch on your left hand side. If you require a chaperone, you may bring a friend or relative. Alternatively, the hospital may provide a chaperone at your request.

- ♥ 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 is placed gently 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 are then 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 echocardiogram will take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete, depending on the complexity of your condition.

Are there any special precautions that I need to take before the echocardiogram?

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

At the end of your echocardiogram

- ♥ Once the echocardiogram 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. If you are unclear please ask.

Further information

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

www.bloodpressureuk.org/BloodPressureandyou/Medicaltests/Echocardiogram

Useful contacts

Royal Berkshire Hospital 0118 322 5111

Cardiac Reception Enquiries 0118 322 6515

British Heart Foundation: www.bhf.org.uk

West Berkshire Heart Support Group – ‘Heartbeats’

Heartbeats website: www.heartbeats-berkshire.co.uk

More information is available on the Trust website www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Department of Cardiology, October 2018. Review due: October 2020