Echocardiogram

What is an echocardiogram?

An echocardiogram (ek-oh-KAR-dee-oh-gram), or "echo," is a test that checks how well your heart is working. It uses sound waves to produce a picture of your heart.

Why is an echo done?

This test is done to help your doctor check:

- The size of your heart's pumping chambers (ventricles)
- How well your heart muscle is pumping
- How well your heart valves are working

The day of your test

No special preparation is necessary.

- You may eat or drink anything you like.
- Go about your normal activities.
- Take any medicines you normally would take, unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
- Do not apply oil or lotions to your chest area.
- Plan to arrive 30 minutes before the scheduled time of the test. The test may take from 30 to 60 minutes.

During the echo

You will remove any clothing above the waist and put on a hospital gown.

Sticky patches (called electrodes) will be placed on your chest. These keep track of your heart's rate, rhythm, and electrical activity. The electrodes will be connected to a machine that will record the electrical activity of your heart. This recording is called an EKG (electrocardiogram).

You will be asked to lie on your left side. A nurse or technician will put a gel on your chest. The gel may feel cold. A small plastic device, called a transducer (trans-DOO-sir), will be placed on your chest, over your heart. The transducer sends and receives high frequency sound waves.

As the sound waves bounce off different parts of your heart, they are picked up by the transducer and sent to a monitor. The monitor shows a picture of your beating heart. You may hear a "whooshing" sound, timed with your heart beat. This is the sound of blood moving through your heart.

After the exam

After the echo is completed, you may go back to your normal daily activities. Technologists and nurses are not allowed to discuss your test results. Your doctor will go over your test results with you. Call your doctor's office in 2 to 3 working days to find out your results.