What Is Echocardiography?

Echocardiography, also called an echo test or heart ultrasound, is a test that takes “moving pictures” of the heart with sound waves. You don’t have to stay in the hospital. It’s not surgery and doesn’t hurt.

**Why do I need an echo test?**
Your doctor may use an echo test to look at your heart’s structure and check how well your heart is working.

This test may be needed if…
- You have a heart murmur.
- You’ve had a heart attack.
- You have unexplained chest pains.
- You’ve had rheumatic fever.
- You have a congenital heart defect.

**How is it done?**
Echo tests are done by trained sonographers. You may have your test done in your doctor’s office, an emergency room, an operating room, a hospital clinic or a hospital room.

- You’ll lie on a bed on your left side or back.
- The sonographer will put special jelly on a probe and move it over your chest area.
- Ultra-high-frequency sound waves will pick up images of your heart and valves. No X-rays will be used.
- Your heart’s movements can be seen on a video screen.
- A videotape or a photograph can be made of the pictures.
- You can sometimes watch during the test.
- It usually takes one hour.
- It’s painless and has no side effects.

Sometimes the probe needs to be closer to your heart to give clearer pictures. You may need a special test called transesophageal echocardiography (TEE).

- As you swallow, a cardiologist will gently pass a tube with a probe on the end of it down your throat and into the esophagus. (This is the tube connecting your mouth to your stomach.)
• Sound waves will pick up images as explained above.
• When the test is finished, the cardiologist will gently pull the probe out.
• You may feel a need to cough.

**What can the test show?**
• The size and shape of your heart
• How well your heart is working overall
• If a wall or section of heart muscle is weak and not working correctly
• If you have problems with your heart’s valves
• If you have a blood clot

**What happens after the echo?**
• Your sonographer will help you clean the gel from your chest.
• Your doctor will talk with you after looking at your echo pictures and discuss what the pictures show.

**An example of an echocardiograph**

**HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?**

1. Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit [heart.org](http://heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.

2. Sign up to get *[Heart Insight](http://heartinsight.org)*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at [heartinsight.org](http://heartinsight.org).

3. Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/supportnetwork](http://heart.org/supportnetwork)

**Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?**

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**When will I know the results?**

**Will I need more tests?**