

ELECTROCARDIOGRAM

An electrocardiogram (or “echo”) is a test that uses sound waves to record the activity of the heart. The test also shows abnormal rhythms, and it can sometimes detect heart muscle damage. A doctor will recommend this test if there are signs of heart trouble. The test is also known as a transthoracic echocardiogram.

The echo test can’t harm you, and it has no side effects.

WHAT TO EXPECT

The test usually takes less than an hour and requires no advanced preparation. The person giving the test can see a picture of the heart on a screen. He or she records the images for a doctor to review.

The test takes place in a quiet, dark room.

The patient will be asked to remove clothing from the waist up. Female patients may wear a gown.

The technician will apply gel to the patient’s chest. The gel helps sound waves reach the heart.

A device called a transducer, which looks like a wand, will be moved around on the chest. The transducer sends waves of sound that bounce off the heart, creating an “echo” that’s translated into pictures of the heart in action.

The patient might be asked to lie in a certain position or breathe in a certain way to improve the quality of the images.

TRANSESOPHAGEAL ECHOCARDIOGRAM

This test, also known as a TEE, might be ordered if a doctor needs a clearer view of the patient’s heart. In this type of echo, the transducer, attached to a flexible tube, is inserted down the throat into the esophagus, which is the passage from the mouth to the stomach. This angle provides a more detailed picture of the heart and major blood vessels near it. For this test, medicine might be given to help the patient relax.

MORE INFORMATION

UK Gill Heart & Vascular Institute:
ukhealthcare.uky.edu/gill
800-333-8874 or
859-257-1000

American Heart Association:
www.heart.org
800-242-8721

American Society of Echocardiography:
www.asecho.org,
919-861-5574