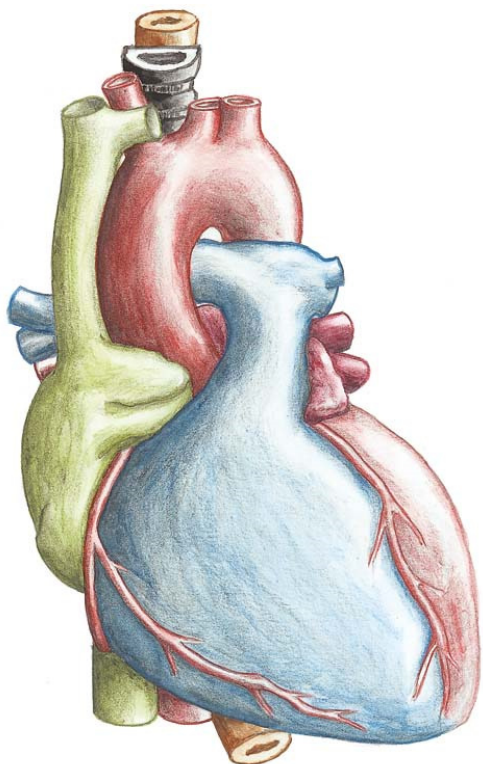


Schematic view of the heart



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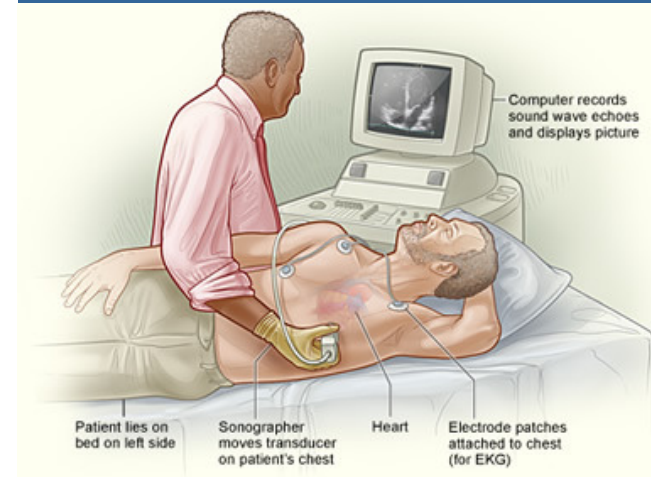
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Echocardiogram



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St. Maarten Medical Center

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What is an echocardiogram?

Echocardiogram, often referred to as cardiac echo or simply 'echo' is a sonogram of the heart. Echocardiography uses standard two-dimensional and Doppler ultrasound to create images of the heart.

What is the use of an echocardiogram?

Echocardiography has become routinely used in the diagnosis, management, and follow-up of patients with any suspected or known heart diseases.

It is one of the most widely used diagnostic tests in cardiology. It can provide a lot of helpful information, including the size and shape of the heart, pumping capacity, and the location and extent of any tissue damage from heart attacks.

Echocardiography can help detect cardiomyopathies, such as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, dilated cardiomyopathy, and many others.

The biggest advantage to echocardiography is that it is noninvasive (does not involve breaking the skin or entering body cavities) and has no known risks or side effects.

Not only can an echocardiogram create ultrasound images of heart structures, but it can also produce accurate assessment of the blood flowing through the heart. This allows assessment of both normal and abnormal blood flow through the heart.

Color Doppler is used to visualize any abnormal communications between the left and right side of the heart, any leaking of blood through the valves (valvular regurgitation), and to estimate how well the valves open (or do not open in the case of valvular stenosis).

Before the test is performed

The cardiologist will determine if an echocardiogram is necessary and the nurses will make an appointment for you. It is not possible for the general practitioner to make an appointment for an echocardiogram.

How is the test performed?

The echocardiogram will take approximately 20 minutes, the processing of the data will take another 10 to 15 minutes.

You will have to remove the top half of your clothes for this test.

During the test the patient will lie on the left side with the right arm over the right hip and the left arm/hand, under the head. This is to optimize the position of the heart in the chest for recording.

The cardiac technician will put three electrodes on the chest and connect them to the echo machine. Then a small amount of ultrasound gel will be placed on the transducer and this will be placed on the chest to obtain a picture of the heart.

There is a mirror on the wall that will enable the patient to look at the screen as the echo is taking place.



Picture of a transducer as used for the echocardiogram

How do I prepare for the test?

There is no special preparation necessary for the echocardiogram. You are allowed to eat and drink as normal unless otherwise specified by the Cardiologist or Cardiac Technician.

When will I get the results?

After analyzing the test results on the computer, the cardiac technician will discuss the results with the cardiologist. The results will be given shortly thereafter.

When there is no cardiologist present at the time of the test, an appointment will be made with the cardiologist on a later date to discuss the results.