
What is an echocardiogram (echo)?

An echocardiogram, also called a cardiac ultrasound or echo, is a medical test that takes pictures of the heart using sound waves. It can show your child's doctor pictures of the structures of the heart. Depending on the test ordered, it can look at the whole heart or a certain area of interest.

What should I do to help my child prepare for the test?

Most often, no preparation is needed. However, if your child needs sedation (medicine to sleep), they may not be able to eat or drink anything before the test. Talk with your child's doctor or nurse about specific care for your child. Below are some guidelines to follow.

Babies

- You can help your baby feel less scared by bringing a special blanket, toy or pacifier to help keep them calm during the test.
- Bring a bottle of juice or formula to feed your baby when the test is done.

Toddlers and preschoolers

- Young children remember things for only a short time. The best time to talk with your child is right before it is time to leave for the hospital.
- Tell your child they will have some "pictures" taken of their heart, so the doctor can look at it.. Use simple words.
- Tell your child the truth. Let them know that you will stay with them as much as possible during the test.
- Bring a favorite book, toy or blanket. Also bring a snack for after the test.

School age children

- School age children have good imaginations. They may scare themselves by imagining something much worse than what will really happen.
- Tell your child they will be going to the hospital to have some pictures taken of their heart.
- Use simple words.
- Tell your child the truth. Try to tell them exactly what will happen.
- Bring a favorite book, toy or game. Also bring along a snack for after the test.

What happens during the test?

- Most often, the echo takes 30 minutes to 1 hour. It is best for 1 parent to stay with your child and help them during the test.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Echo, continued

- An echo machine is made up of computers with handheld instruments called transducers.
 - A transducer looks like a wand or microphone. This wand makes “pictures” on the computer screen.
 - The transducer or leads do not shock or hurt your child.
- A trained sonographer does the echo.
 - They will put warm gel (jelly) your child’s chest. This is to get rid of the air between the skin and the transducer as it is moved across the skin.
 - They may also connect your child to a heart monitor to check the heart rhythm.
- A cardiologist (heart doctor) may come into the room to watch or do part of the echo.
- The echo pictures will be in your child’s medical record.

Are there any risks?

An echo has been found to be a safe test. It does not involve the use of X-ray, and there is no radiation. The echo will not hurt your child.

What happens after the test?

The sonographer will:

- Clean the gel off your child’s chest. Your child can then get dressed.
- Let you know when you may leave.

When will I get the results?

The heart doctor will look at the pictures. The results are then sent to your child’s doctor. Your child’s doctor will call or send the results to you within several days.

Does my child need follow-up care?

Talk with your child’s doctor about when they need to see your child again.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child’s doctor or a member of your child’s healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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