



# Echocardiogram (Echo)

Patient and Family Education

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**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.**

## **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 images of the structures of the heart. Depending on the test ordered, it can look at the entire heart or a specific area of interest.

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

Usually, no preparation is needed. However, if your child needs sedation (medicine to sleep), he may not be able to eat or drink anything prior to the test. Your child's doctor or nurse will talk with you about more specific care for your child. Below are some general guidelines to follow.

**Infants** - Although you cannot explain the test to your baby, you can help your baby feel more secure during the test by bringing a special blanket, toy or pacifier. Please bring along a bottle of juice or formula to feed your baby when the test is done.

**Toddlers and preschool age children** - Young children remember things for only a short time, so the best time to talk with your child is before the test. Tell your child that he will be having some "pictures" taken, so his doctor can help him get better. Try to use simple words. It is important to be honest with your child. Let your child know that mommy or daddy will stay with him as much as possible during the test. When you come to the hospital, bring a favorite book, toy or blanket. You may also bring along a snack for after the test.

**School-age children** - School age children have good imaginations and they may frighten themselves by imagining something much worse than the actual test. The day of the test, tell your child that he is going to the hospital to have some pictures taken of the inside of his body. Use simple words. Be honest. Try to tell your child exactly what will happen. When you come to the hospital, bring along a favorite videotape, book, toy or game. If you wish, you may also bring along a snack for after the test.

## **What will the test be like?**

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.
- Warm gel (jelly) is spread on your child's chest to get rid of the air between the skin and the transducer as it is moved across the skin.
- In order to check the heart rhythm during the echo, your child may also be connected to a heart monitor.
- The transducer or leads do not shock or hurt your child.

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

## ***Echocardiogram, continued***

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A trained sonographer performs the echo. Sometimes a pediatric cardiologist (heart doctor) may come into the room to watch or take pictures. The test usually takes 30 minutes to one hour. The echo pictures are kept in your child's medical record. It is best for one parent to stay with your child and help him during the test.

### ***Are there any risks to my child?***

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

### ***What happens after the test?***

The gel is cleaned off from your child's chest. Then your child can get dressed. The sonographer will let you know when you may leave.

### ***When do I get the results?***

A pediatric cardiologist looks 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.

### ***Is any follow up care needed?***

Your child's doctor will let you know when your child should be seen again.

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