

ECHOCARDIOGRAM

An echocardiogram (echo) is a simple, safe, non-invasive procedure that is used to diagnose and evaluate the treatment of various heart disorders. In this procedure, sound waves are penetrated through the chest wall and recorded on a VCR tape.

An echo enables the physician to assess the heart's wall thickness, chamber size and valve function. It also helps the physician visualize any clots or masses that may be in the heart.

Echoes are also used to measure the heart's function, which is the ability of the heart muscle to contract and push blood through its four chambers.

If a physician wants to evaluate the direction and velocity of blood as it flows through the chambers of the heart, he performs what is called a Doppler as part of the echo.

No special preparation is needed prior to an echocardiogram. The test is performed by placing the patient on his left side. During the test, the patient is monitored by an EKG. A small amount of gel is placed on the transducer in order to transmit the sound waves through the chest wall. The transducer is then placed on the chest to obtain images of the heart. The patient may feel a little pressure with the movement of the transducer as it passes across the chest, but the procedure is essentially painless. The entire procedure takes about 20 - 30 minutes.