

Transthoracic Echocardiogram

What to expect

This handout describes a transthoracic echocardiogram, an ultrasound exam of your heart.

Your appointment at the Echo Lab is on:

Day: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____ a.m. / p.m.

If you need to change this appointment, please call the Echo Lab at 206.598.7000 or 800.694.6895.



The Echo Lab is inside the Regional Heart Center, on the 3rd (main) floor of the medical center.

The Echo Lab

We welcome you to the Echocardiography (Echo) Lab at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC). In the Echo Lab, we use ultrasound images to evaluate and diagnose heart disease.

Our staff are experts in patient care and heart research. We will work with you and your healthcare provider to diagnose any heart problems you may have. This will help determine the best treatment for you.

What is a transthoracic echocardiogram?

The word *transthoracic* means “through the thoracic wall.” The thoracic wall includes the rib cage, skin, and muscles that surround your heart and lungs.

An *echocardiogram* (echo) is an ultrasound exam of the heart. Ultrasound uses sound waves to create images of organs and other structures inside the body. You may know that ultrasound is used to look at a baby through a pregnant woman's belly.

A transthoracic echocardiogram will create images of your heart. These images will be saved to a computer. A *cardiologist* (heart doctor) who specializes in ultrasound exams will review the images.

Your cardiologist will then send your healthcare provider a report. This report will tell your provider what we have learned about your heart's chambers, valves, and blood flow.

Why do I need this exam?

Your provider has asked you to have an echo because:

- We want to learn more about the chambers, valves, or blood flow of your heart.

And:

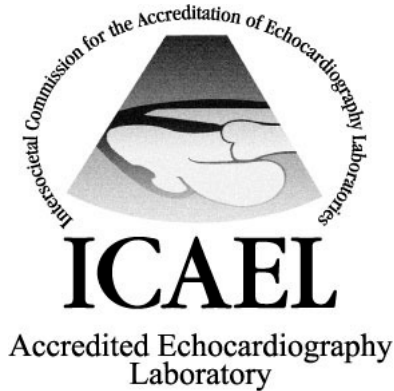
- An echo is the best way to do this.

How do I prepare for the exam?

- Plan to be in the Echo Lab **at least 1½ hours** for your exam.
- We will call you to confirm your appointment 1 or 2 days before your exam.

What happens during the exam?

- Once you are in the exam room, we will ask you to undress from the waist up and put on a hospital gown. You do not need to remove jewelry.
- We will ask you to lie on the exam table on your back. We will:
 - Take your blood pressure using a blood pressure cuff
 - Place electrodes on your chest so we can monitor your heart rhythm
- We will then ask you to turn onto your left side. You will be on your left side for most of the exam.
- The *cardiac sonographer* (an ultrasound technologist with special training in exams of the heart) will put a small amount of gel on your chest to help sound waves enter your chest. The gel may feel cool.
- The sonographer will hold a small sensor called a *transducer* on your chest. The transducer sends sound waves into your chest. These sound waves bounce back from your heart to make images on a monitor. The sound waves are safe and will not cause pain.
- At times, we may ask you to hold your breath. This helps us get clearer images. We may also apply a little pressure with the transducer to keep good contact with your skin.
- If you are uncomfortable or need to take a break at any time, please let us know. We will do our best to make the exam as comfortable as possible.



- If you would like, you will be able to watch the ultrasound images of your heart on the monitor. Please feel free to ask questions.
- UWMC is a teaching hospital. Medical staff who are being trained in echocardiography may be invited to work with your cardiac sonographer during your exam. We will ask you if it is OK for this staff to be present. We respect your privacy and your feelings, so please tell us if you are not OK with this.
- If the ultrasound images are not clear enough, we may place a small tube called an *intravenous* (IV) line into a vein in your hand or arm. Then we will inject *contrast* (X-ray dye) through the IV. Contrast makes easier to see the details of your heart in the ultrasound images.
- When your exam is over:
 - We will remove the electrodes from your chest.
 - We will give you a warm washcloth to clean off the gel.
 - You may then dress and leave the lab.

How do I get my test results?

After your exam, the cardiologist will review the images. Your provider who referred you for this test will receive the results within 24 hours of your exam. **Your provider will talk with you about the results of your exam** at your follow-up visit or over the phone.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Echocardiography Lab:
206.598.7000