Transthoracic Echocardiogram

Welcome to the Echocardiography (Echo) Lab at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC). We evaluate and diagnose heart disease by using ultrasound to show images of your heart.

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

A Transthoracic Echocardiogram (Echo)

An echocardiogram (echo) is an ultrasound exam of the heart. Ultrasound creates images of organs and other structures inside the body. It uses sound waves to produce these images.

Ultrasound lets us look at your heart through your chest wall, just as it is used to look at a baby through a pregnant woman's belly. The ultrasound images of your heart will be recorded on a digital computer system.

The cardiologist (a heart doctor who specializes in ultrasound exams of the heart) will review these images and send your health care provider detailed information about your heart. We will tell your provider what we have learned about your heart's chambers, valves, and blood flow.

Why do I need this exam?

You are having an echo because:

- There is some concern about the chambers, valves, or blood flow of your heart.
  
  And

- An echo is the best way to assess these problems.

Your appointment is on

_______________ (day)

_______________ (date)

at _________ a.m. / p.m.

Please call the Echo Lab if you need to change this appointment: 206-598-7000 or 800-694-6895.
Scheduling Your Echo

- Your health care provider has asked you to have an echo. Allow at least 1½ hours for your exam.
- We will call to confirm your appointment 1 or 2 days before your exam.

The Transthoracic Echo 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.

Imaging Your Heart

- We will ask you to lie on the exam table on your back. We will monitor your blood pressure and 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. If you need to take a break, or if you are uncomfortable, please let us know.
- The cardiac sonographer (an ultrasound technologist with special training in exams of the heart) will take images of your heart by holding 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.
- The sonographer will put a small amount of gel on your chest to help sound waves from the transducer to penetrate into your chest. The gel may feel cool.
- At times, we may ask you to hold your breath to help get clearer images. Also, we may apply a little pressure with the transducer to maintain good contact. If you are uncomfortable 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. The cardiac sonographer who does your exam may be assisted by other medical staff who are being trained in echocardiography. Please do not be concerned by discussion and teaching that may take place during your exam. We respect your privacy and your feelings, so please let us know if you feel uncomfortable.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

UWMC Echo Lab:
206-598-7000

If the ultrasound images are not clear enough, we may place an *intravenous* (IV) line in a vein in your hand or arm. Then we will inject a dye (*contrast agent*) through the IV to make the ultrasound images easier to see.

When your exam is finished, we will remove the heart monitor and give you a warm washcloth to clean off the gel. After that, you may dress and be on your way.

Test Results

After your echo exam, the cardiologist will review the recorded images. Your health care 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.