



# What Is Echocardiography?

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Echocardiography, also called an echo test, is a test that takes “moving pictures” of the heart with sound waves. You don’t have to stay in the hospital; it’s not surgery and doesn’t hurt. This test is done to help your doctor find out if you have problems with your heart or with how it’s working.

This test may be needed if...

- You have a heart murmur.
- You’ve had a heart attack.
- You have unexplained chest pains.
- You’ve had rheumatic fever.
- You have a congenital heart defect.

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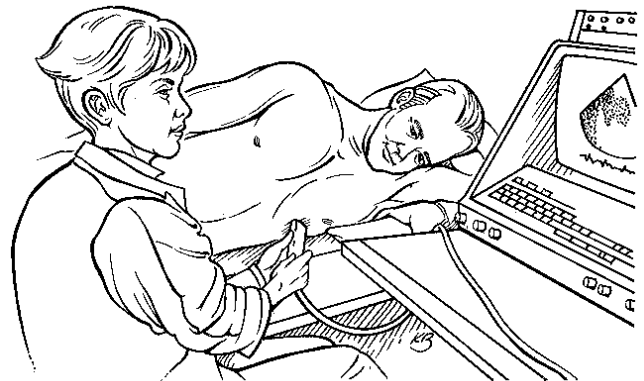
## How is it done?

- You’ll lie on a bed on your side or back.
- A technician will put special jelly on a probe and move it over your chest area.
- Ultra-high-frequency sound waves will pick up images of your heart and valves. No X-rays will be used.
- Your heart’s movements can be seen on a video screen.
- A videotape or a photograph can be made of the pictures.
- You can watch during the test.
- It usually takes less than 15–20 minutes.
- It’s painless and has no side effects.
- Your doctor will talk to you about the results.

Sometimes the probe needs to be closer to your heart to give clearer pictures. You may need a special test called transesophageal echocardiography (TEE). In this test:

- As you swallow, a technician will gently pass a tube with a probe on the end of it down your throat and into the esophagus. (This is the tube connecting your mouth to your stomach.)

- Sound waves will pick up images as explained above.
- When the test is finished, the technician will gently pull the probe out.
- You may feel a need to cough.



## What will the test show?

- The size and shape of your heart
- How well your heart is working overall
- If a wall or section of heart muscle is weak and not working correctly
- If you have problems with your heart's valves
- If you have a blood clot

## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).  
We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.  
Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

## What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

### Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

Will I need more tests?

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Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update* at [americanheart.org/statistics](http://americanheart.org/statistics).

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