

# Echocardiogram (Echo Test)

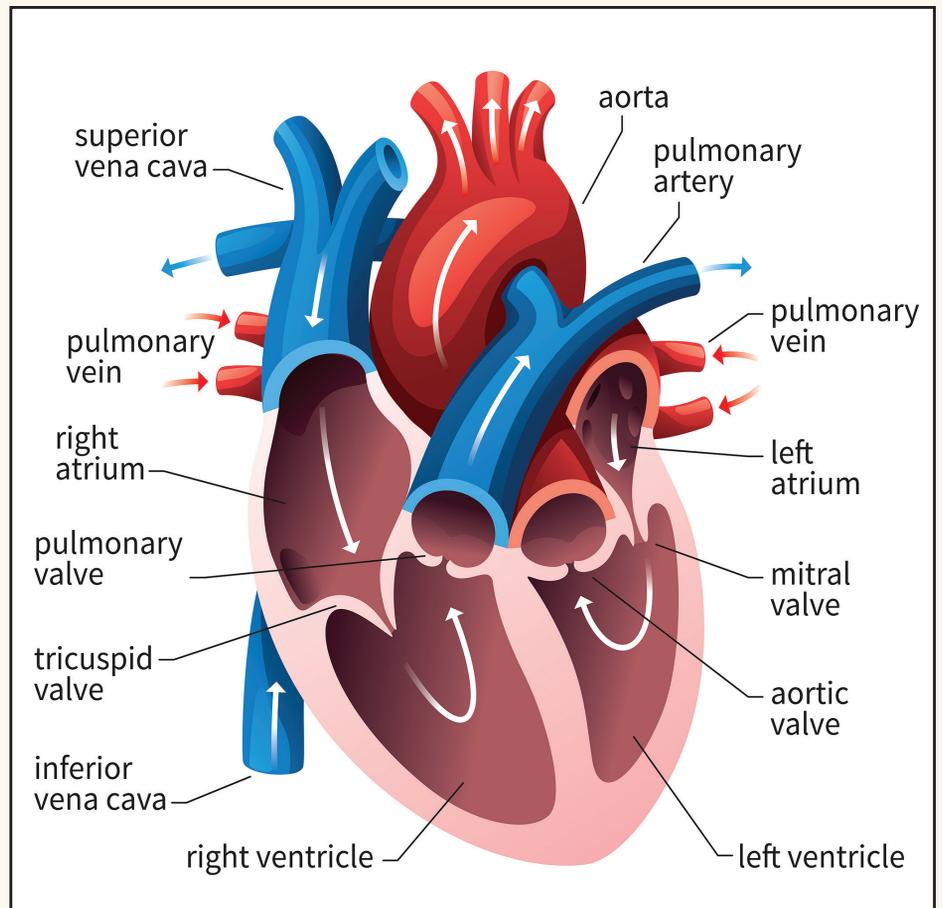
An echocardiogram uses sound waves to produce images of your heart. This common test allows your doctor to see your heart beating and pumping blood. Your doctor can use the images from an echocardiogram to identify heart disease.

Depending on what information your doctor needs, you may have one of several types of echocardiograms. Each type of echocardiogram involves few, if any, risks.

## Why it's done

Your doctor may suggest an echocardiogram to:

- Check for problems with the valves or chambers of your heart
- Check if heart problems are the cause of symptoms such as shortness of breath or chest pain
- Detect congenital heart defects before birth (fetal echocardiogram)



## Results

### Information from the Echocardiogram may show:

- **Changes in your heart size.** Weakened or damaged heart valves, high blood pressure or other diseases can cause the chambers of your heart to enlarge or the walls of your heart to be abnormally thickened.
- **Pumping strength.** The measurements obtained from an echocardiogram include the percentage of blood that's pumped out of a filled ventricle with each heartbeat (ejection fraction) and the volume of blood pumped by the heart in one minute (cardiac output). A heart that isn't pumping enough blood to meet your body's needs can lead to symptoms of heart failure.
- **Damage to the heart muscle.** An echocardiogram helps your doctor determine whether all parts of the heart wall are contributing normally to your heart's pumping activity. Areas of heart wall that move weakly may have been damaged during a heart attack, or have been receiving too little oxygen.
- **Valve problems.** An echocardiogram can help your doctor determine if your heart valves open wide enough for adequate blood flow or close fully to prevent blood leakage.
- **Heart defects.** An echocardiogram can show problems with the heart chambers, abnormal connections between the heart and major blood vessels, and complex heart defects that are present at birth.

## Why do I need an echo test?

Patients may be referred for an echocardiogram for a variety of different reasons. It may be due to symptoms concerning for heart disease such as shortness of breath, chest pain, palpitation, dizziness and other related symptoms.

It may be to investigate a murmur heard on physical exam. It may also be to monitor existing heart conditions such as valve problems or heart failure.

Source: Mayo Clinic Staff