

ECHOCARDIOGRAMS

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An echocardiogram uses sound waves to create pictures of the heart and the vessels, and is also referred to as “transthoracic” echocardiogram—“across the chest.” Ultrasound is used in order to create a picture of the hearts’ four chambers and four valves. Any damage and disease is then detected through the images and sounds produced.

Echocardiograms are painless, and allow physicians to:

- Check the health and performance of the heart valves
- Measure the heart wall and shape
- Any abnormalities in the heart wall motion are detected, along with diseases or accumulation of fluid in the pericardium, which is the sac around the heart
- Detect blood clots

These are useful for diagnosing:

- Valvular heart disease: valves may have narrowed, or valves may be leaking
- Rheumatic heart disease: rheumatic fever may contribute to troubles with the heart’s valves, chambers and vessels
- Bacterial endocarditis: infections in one or more of the heart valves
- Cardiomyopathy: the heart muscle is unusually thick, stiff, dilated or weak
- Heart failure: heart is unable to uphold sufficient blood flow and circulation
- Pericarditis: inflammation of the pericardium, which is the sac around the heart
- Tumors in the heart
- Coronary heart disease: obstruction of the blood flow to the heart and the body, which is due to the hardening of arteries