



Understanding Your Echocardiogram

A step-by-step guide to help you feel prepared and informed

An echocardiogram is a painless ultrasound examination of the heart. It uses sound waves — not radiation — to create moving images of your heart's chambers, valves, and blood flow. This checklist walks you through what to expect, before, during, and after your appointment.

1 Before Your Appointment

- ☐ Wear comfortable, two-piece clothing — you'll likely undress from the waist up
- ☐ No special fasting or medication changes are usually needed — confirm with your doctor
- ☐ Bring a list of current medications and any prior heart-related test results
- ☐ Arrive a few minutes early to complete any paperwork
- ☐ Set aside about 30–45 minutes for the appointment
- ☐ Ask in advance if yours is a "stress echo" — preparation differs

2 During the Exam

- 1 You'll lie on an exam table, usually turned onto your left side
- 2 A small amount of gel is applied to your chest to help sound waves travel
- 3 A handheld device (transducer) is gently moved across your chest to capture images
- 4 You may be asked to hold your breath briefly or shift position for clearer views
- 5 The exam itself is painless, non-invasive, and uses no radiation

3 Key Terms, Explained

Ejection Fraction (EF)

The percentage of blood pumped out of the heart with each beat

Valve

One of four structures that keep blood flowing in the right direction

Chamber

One of the heart's four internal compartments

Doppler

A technique used to visualize the direction and speed of blood flow

4 Questions Worth Asking Your Doctor

- ? What specifically are we looking for with this test?
- ? Will I need any follow-up tests based on today's exam?
- ? When and how will I receive my results?
- ? Can I drive myself afterward, or should I bring someone?

This checklist provides general educational information to help you feel prepared for a cardiac ultrasound examination. It is not a substitute for personalized medical advice — always follow the guidance of your own healthcare provider.

Compiled drawing on decades of clinical experience in cardiac and vascular sonography — Dr. med. Bernhard Scheja