PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Stress Echocardiogram

This information explains what a stress echocardiogram (EH-koh-KAR-dee-oh-gram) is. It also explains what to expect before, during, and after your procedure.

## About your stress echocardiogram

An echocardiogram, or echo, is a procedure that uses ultrasound (sound waves) to make pictures of your heart.

A stress echo takes pictures of your heart before and after physical activity. These pictures show the different parts of your heart and how they're working when your heart needs to pump harder.

Your stress echo lets your doctor see:

- How well your heart muscle is moving.
- How well your heart valves are working.
- The size of the 4 chambers of your heart.
- How your blood flows through your heart valves and heart chambers.

If your heart is not working like it should, you may have

symptoms, such as chest pain or trouble breathing. Your echo can help your doctor find the cause of these symptoms.

Your echo also can give your doctor information about your coronary (KOR-uh-NAYR-ee) arteries. These are the blood vessels that carry blood to your heart. Your echo will show your doctor if your heart gets enough blood flow during physical activity. It can help find blocked arteries or other problems that only show up when your heart is working hard.

### Ultrasound enhancing agent (UEA)

If the ultrasound pictures are not clear enough during your echo, you may get an ultrasound enhancing agent (UEA). A UEA helps create clearer pictures of your heart.

If you need a UEA, your care team will pause the echo to explain what is happening. They will:

- Explain why a UEA is needed and how it will help.
- Tell you what to expect during and after you get the UEA.
- Answer any questions you have and make sure you feel comfortable.

After you get the UEA, your technician will continue your echo and take more pictures of your heart.

Sometimes, your doctor may already know before your echo that you'll need a UEA. This may be based on your medical history or past imaging tests. If your doctor knows that you need a UEA, they'll tell you ahead of time.

## What to do before your stress echocardiogram

- Talk with your doctor about all the medicines you take. Ask them if you'll need to stop taking any of them before your procedure.
- If you have diabetes, talk with the healthcare provider who prescribes your insulin or other medicines for diabetes. They may need to change the dose of your medicine (the amount of medicine you take). Ask them what you should do the morning of your procedure.
- **Do not eat or drink anything 4 hours before your procedure.**
- **Do not smoke for 24 hours (1 day) before your procedure.**

## What to expect during your stress echocardiogram

Wear comfortable clothes that are easy to take off. You'll need to undress from the waist up and change into a hospital gown. You can keep your pants, shorts, or skirt on

during your procedure.

Wear rubber-soled shoes (such as sneakers) or bring them with you to your procedure.

There are 4 steps in this procedure:

1. You will have an electrocardiogram (ee-LEK-troh-KAR-dee-oh-gram), or EKG. This is a test that records your heart's electrical activity. Your technician will also check your blood pressure.
2. You will have a resting echo. To learn more, read *Resting Echocardiogram* (www.mskcc.org/pe/resting-echo).
3. Your technician will do another EKG and check your blood pressure again while you walk on a treadmill.
4. You will have a stress echo. This is done after you have raised your heart rate on the treadmill. Doing a stress echo after physical activity helps your doctor see how well your heart works under stress. The stress echo is done the same way as the resting echo.

The whole procedure will take about 90 minutes.

# What to expect after your stress echocardiogram

Your doctor should have the results of your stress echo 24 hours after your procedure. If you don't hear from your doctor after a few days, call their office to get your results.

If you have an MSK MyChart account, you'll be able to see your results as soon as they're available. You may see them before your doctor does. While some results are easy to understand, others may be confusing or worrying.

You can choose to look at your results, but we recommend waiting until you talk with your doctor. They can explain what your results mean.

If you do not have an MSK MyChart account, you can sign up at mskmychart.mskcc.org. You can also ask a member of your care team to send you an invitation.

If you need help with your account, call the MSK MyChart Help Desk at 646-227-2593. They're available Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Eastern time).

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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