
Understanding your TEE (*transesophageal echocardiogram*)

Carolina Cardiology Consultants

What is a transesophageal echocardiogram?

An echocardiogram (“echo”) is a test that produces an image of the heart by using harmless high-frequency ultrasound waves. A transesophageal echocardiogram lets your doctor record images of your heart from inside your esophagus (the tube that leads from your throat to your stomach).

In this test, a long, narrow tube is placed into your mouth and down your esophagus. A device called a “transducer” is attached to the end of the tube. It sends out ultrasound waves. These waves bounce off the heart and return to the transducer. The waves are sent to a computer, which uses the wave pattern to create images of your heart.

Heart images can be seen on a monitor that looks like a TV screen. Images also can be recorded on videotape or a digital recording for your doctor to review.

Why is a TEE performed?

A TEE may be performed when clearer images of your heart are needed or the results from a standard echo test are insufficient. Because the esophagus lies behind the heart, the physician can get a closer look at your heart without interference.

A TEE helps to evaluate:

- The heart valves, chambers and function
- Heart defects
- Any tears in the lining of the aorta (the aorta is a large blood vessel that carries blood from the heart to the body)
- Blood clots, masses or infection

How long does the test take?

The test itself takes about 30 minutes. However, allow about 3 hours from the time you check into the hospital or clinic until the time you can go home.

When do I get my test results?

Your doctor may discuss test results with you during your appointment, or you may be asked to return at a later date.

It is normal to feel anxious about having a heart test, but it is important to understand that having a TEE provides valuable information that cannot be obtained any other way. Having this test takes the burden of guesswork off you and your doctor. Because you have had this test, you know that any advice about treatment is based on facts found during your test.

You may be advised to make changes in the way you live to reduce future health problems. A non-surgical treatment may be recommended, or you may be advised to have surgery.

Whatever your doctor’s recommendation, you will know that it is based on the best possible information.

Before you arrive at the hospital/clinic

- Don’t eat or drink liquids for 6 hours before the test.
- Tell your doctor about all medications you take, especially those for ulcers or a hiatal hernia.
- Ask your doctor if you can take your usual medications beforehand (if you can, take them with a sip of water only).
- Tell your doctor if you have trouble swallowing.
- Tell your doctor if you have allergies to any medications, especially medications that help you relax.
- Remove dentures or any other artificial dental item from your mouth.
- Have someone drive you home from the hospital, doctor’s office or clinic.
- Discuss any questions or concerns you have with your doctor, nurse or specially trained technologist.

Once you arrive at the hospital/clinic

- You will be asked to put on a hospital gown.
- An IV will be inserted by the nurse.
- You will be given a numbing agent to gargle in your throat before the tube is inserted (sometimes a numbing spray also may be administered).

During your test

You will be administered medication through an IV to sedate and relax you throughout the procedure.

Once you are relaxed, your doctor will gently insert the tube into your mouth. You will be asked to swallow.

As you swallow, the tube will move slowly into your esophagus. It is normal to gag when the tube first goes into your throat, but the urge to gag will go away. You should not feel any pain during this procedure.

After the tube (with the transducer at the tip) is placed in the esophagus, images of the heart can be seen. By moving the transducer various ways, images of different structures can be recorded.

Your heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen levels will be monitored. Oxygen will be given if needed. Secretions will be cleared from your mouth.

After your test

Because your throat will be numb, you should not eat or drink for at least 1 hour after you go home. When your throat is no longer numb (after about 1 hour), you may drink cold liquids.

For mild soreness of the throat, you may use throat lozenges or gargle with warm salt water as needed. The medication may cause drowsiness for several hours; therefore, do not drive or operate machinery for the remainder of the day.

You should not drink alcohol for 24 hours after the procedure.

Follow any instructions you are given. If you have any questions or concerns, be sure to talk to your doctor or nurse.

When to call your doctor

If you have any of the following symptoms, call your doctor right away:

- Trouble swallowing
- Stiff neck
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Internal pain
- Bleeding
- Chills or fever

My doctor's phone number:

Thank you for choosing Carolina Cardiology Consultants for your heart care needs.