



*Better
Together*

Patient information

Transoesophageal Echocardiograph (TOE)

Medical Directorate - Cardio Respiratory
Department

An echocardiogram is a painless scan of the heart using high frequency sound waves. Placing some jelly and then a probe, on the left hand side of the chest wall, over the heart is how an echocardiogram is usually carried out. In some patients however, this approach is not possible or produces pictures of inadequate quality, and a different route for obtaining the pictures has to be used.

What is a TOE?

Transoesophageal Echocardiograph (TOE) is a method of obtaining echocardiographic pictures of the heart without having to pass the sound waves through the chest wall. This is done by passing a camera tipped tube into the patient's oesophagus which can be positioned behind the heart in order to obtain much clearer images of the heart which will provide a clinician with more information.

You must not eat or drink for at least four hours before the test to stop you from being sick during it.

What does the test consist of?

You will lie down on a couch and a small needle will be inserted in the back of your hand. A local anaesthetic spray is used to numb your throat. A small mouth guard will then be placed in your mouth and you will be asked to gently bite on it. This guard protects your teeth from damage by the flexible tube and protects the tube from your teeth. A small amount of sedative drug will then be injected through a needle in the back of your hand to help make you feel relaxed and drowsy.

A probe (transducer) that has been reduced in size to just a few centimetres is mounted at the end of a flexible tube, which you will be asked to swallow.

The tube will then pass from your mouth down your gullet (oesophagus, food pipe) and into your stomach. In this position, the probe will lie directly behind and almost in contact with your heart so that the ultrasound waves can reach the heart very easily without being obstructed by lungs or ribs.

What are the benefits of having a TOE?

Excellent pictures of your moving heart can be produced in this way. These moving pictures of the heart can give us important information about its structure and function.

What are the risks of having a TOE?

This is a very safe procedure. However, as with many procedures, it does carry risks. There is a possibility of damage to teeth, pharynx and oesophagus.

There could be abnormalities to your heart rhythm or an adverse reaction to the medication. You will be able to discuss the procedure with the doctor. You will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you understand the procedure and what it involves.

A doctor and physiologist will be present to support you and monitor you throughout the test.

Are there any alternatives available?

There are no alternative tests which can provide a consultant with the detailed information gained by a TOE. Any issues you may have regarding this test must be discussed with your referring consultant.

What will happen if I don't have any treatment?

If you decide not to go ahead with the procedure, you may find that your doctor cannot treat your symptoms/condition appropriately. The pros and cons of the procedure should be discussed as an individual case with the referring consultant prior to an appointment being arranged for the test.

What anaesthetic or sedation will I be given?

You will be given anaesthetic throat spray and intravenous sedation. The drugs used in sedation may affect your memory or concentration for up to 24 hours. Many patients remember nothing about the procedure or even what the doctor has said to them afterwards. **For these reasons, you must have a friend or relative collect you from the department.**

If you are worried about any of these risks, please speak to your Consultant or a member of their team before you are due to have this treatment.

After your TOE

Afterwards you will almost certainly feel drowsy and want to sleep for a while. You will be able to do so if you wish and you should therefore be prepared to stay for about two hours in all. Just as when you have an anaesthetic at the dentist, you will be asked to take things easy for the rest of the day.

If you are at all worried about the test, you may contact any of the people listed below who will be happy to answer your questions.

Important advice

- Please be careful and rest when you get home.
- You may have difficulty remembering the procedure and the results that you may have been given. This will be the result of the sedation, which can stay in your system for up to 24 hours.
- You are advised to have a responsible adult to stay with you for the next 24 hours.

For next 24 hours you must not

- Travel alone.
- Drive any vehicle.
- Operate machinery (including domestic appliances such as a kettle).
- Climb ladders.
- Make important decisions, sign any business or legal documents.
- Drink alcohol.
- Return to work within 12 hours of treatment. Your general health and any medicines you are taking may increase the time you need off work.

You should

- Take it easy for the rest of the day, avoid strenuous activity.
- Take your medications as usual.
- Let someone else care for anyone you usually look after, such as children or elderly or sick relatives.

Further Information

Dr Adrian Chenzbraun
Consultant Cardiologist

Karen Wardle – Chief Technician
Cardio Respiratory Department
Tel: 0151 706 2710
Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2710

Author: Cardio Respiratory Department
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