



Catholic Healthcare West

Ask the Expert
Arizona Republic

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Q: What is an echocardiogram and why is this test important?

A: An echocardiogram is a non-invasive imaging test that allows doctors to use sound waves to see how your heart is beating and how well it is pumping blood. These sound waves are converted into images on a computer screen and help your doctor detect and manage many types of heart disease.

Echocardiography relies on the experience and training of both the doctor and a sonographer. A sonographer is a specialized technologist who has completed a rigorous course of education, including the extensive study of anatomy, physiology and disease processes. Their interpretive and technical abilities combined determine the diagnostic accuracy of an echocardiogram.

Depending on what kind of information your doctor needs, you may be scheduled for one of the following echocardiograms:

- A transthoracic echocardiogram is the most common cardiac ultrasound test. For this test, a sonographer uses a device, known as a transducer, to aim an ultrasound beam through your chest to your heart. It usually includes a Doppler echocardiogram which can help your doctor measure the speed and direction of the blood flow in your heart.
- A transesophageal echocardiogram is performed when it's hard to get a clear picture of your heart with a standard echocardiogram. In this procedure, a flexible tube containing a transducer is guided down your throat and into your esophagus, allowing the sonographer to obtain more detailed images of your heart.
- A stress echocardiogram is used to help detect those heart problems that only occur during physical activity. In this test, ultrasound images of your heart are taken before and immediately after exercise.

The Intersocietal Commission for the Accreditation of Echocardiography Laboratories has nationally recognized Mercy Gilbert Medical Center for its commitment to providing high quality patient care and its provision of quality diagnostic testing for the diagnosis of heart disease. To learn more, please visit mercygilbert.org.

Alphonse Ambrosia, D.O., serves as the Medical Director of Mercy Gilbert Medical Center's Echocardiography Laboratory. For a doctor referral, please call ResourceLink toll-free at 1.877.728.5414.