

You have been given this information leaflet because your baby needs an echocardiogram. This will help you to understand what an echocardiogram is and why your baby needs it.

What is an echocardiogram?

An echocardiogram, also known as an echo, is an ultrasound scan of the heart. The scan uses sound waves that bounce back as an echo when the sound waves hit an object, such as a heart valve. A computer converts the reflected ultrasound echoes into an image. The pictures give accurate information about the pumping action of the heart and the structure of the heart and valves.



Image of an Echocardiogram

How is an echocardiogram performed?

A cardiologist or paediatrician will perform the echocardiogram. The machine used is the same machine that is used for pregnancy scans. The ultrasound machine has a small hand held device called a transducer which is connected to a computer and a monitor. Lubricating gel is placed onto your baby's chest, this allows the transducer to move smoothly over the surface of the skin and ensures continuous contact with the skin. A probe in the transducer transmits a pulse of high frequency sound. The sound waves which are reflected are then shown as a picture of your baby's heart on the monitor. The scan will usually take around fifteen minutes, however it may be difficult to get a picture if your baby is active.



Echocardiogram being performed on a baby

Are there any risks or side effects?

There are no known risks or side effects of the scan. The scan will be performed externally and will not cause any discomfort to your baby.

Why does my baby need an echocardiogram?

Your baby may have had a heart murmur detected on a routine newborn baby check. In the majority of such babies, a murmur does not equate to heart disease. Another possibility is that your baby may have shown some signs or symptoms which may indicate congenital heart disease. For example blue skin colour, breathlessness or have shown a low oxygen level in their body. It is important that the scan is performed as some babies have a strong family history of severe congenital heart disease, with a possible risk of inherited problems. Some babies may have congenital abnormalities in other organs, with a small chance of an associated heart problem.

What will happen next?

After your baby has had an echo, the doctor will explain the findings to you, and whether there is any need for further action. Many babies will have normal findings and will be discharged with no follow-up. Some may have a mild problem that is expected to resolve with time. A repeat echo will be arranged for when they are older to check on progress. A few babies may have a significant problem which will require monitoring/treatment by a cardiologist. A referral will then be made to

the cardiology team at Birmingham Children's Hospital. Babies who need follow-up will be given a named consultant paediatrician who will also inform your GP.

Glossary

Cardiologist = A doctor specialising in the heart.

Congenital abnormality = A condition which is present from birth.

Congenital Heart Disease = A general term used to refer to a group of different heart abnormalities that a baby can be born with.

Echocardiogram or Echo = An echocardiogram is an ultrasound scan of the heart.

Heart Murmur = An unusual sound from the heart, heard while listening with a stethoscope, different from the normal sound of the heart.

Ultrasound machine = A machine that uses high frequency sound waves to create an image of part of the inside of the body.

Other sources of useful information

The British Heart Foundation

Funds research, vital prevention activity and provides support for anyone living with heart disease

0300 330 3311 lines are open **9am-5pm Monday-Friday**

<http://www.bhf.org.uk/default.aspx>

Down's Heart Group

Support and information relating to heart conditions associated with Down's Syndrome.

0844 288 4800

www.dhg.org.uk

References

British Heart Foundation (BHF) (2010) Congenital Heart Disease [online]:BHF.[Accessed 7 July 2010]. Available at:
http://www.bhf.org.uk/living_with_a_heart_condition.htm

http://www.newbornnetworks.org.uk/staffs/parent_information.htm

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Parent Information Leaflet

Echocardiogram