

Department of Cardiac Investigations

Patient's guide to a Transoesophageal Echocardiogram (TOE)

Introduction

You have been asked to attend to have a Transoesophageal Echocardiogram (TOE). This leaflet is designed to help you understand the procedure.

What is a Transoesophageal Echocardiogram?

It is an ultrasound test to look at the structure of the heart chambers and valves. It involves swallowing a probe to view the heart from the gullet.

What are the benefits of the procedure?

Usually ultrasound of the heart is performed through the chest wall (transthoracic echocardiogram). The picture may not be very clear because the ribs and lungs tend to get in the way.

Because the heart lies in front of the gullet, the pictures obtained with the TOE are much clearer. Also, some structures are seen well only on a TOE.

Are there risks to having the procedure?

Most people have no difficulties with the procedure. Occasionally, there can be minor discomfort on swallowing for 24 hours afterwards. Serious complications are very rare. Very rarely, we are unable to pass the probe and the procedure cannot be performed. If that happens an alternative test will be arranged.



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Transport

You will need to have someone bring you to hospital and also to take you home again as you cannot drive for 24 hours after the procedure as you will be given relaxing (sedation) medication.

You may wish for someone to stay with you on the ward during your admission, but are asked to keep your visitors to a minimum.

Items to bring in

We advise you to bring an overnight bag with toiletries and nightwear, just in case you need to stay overnight.

When do I stop eating and drinking before the test?

If your test appointment is in the morning (before 1230): You must not eat or drink after midnight the night before.

If your test appointment is in the afternoon (after 1230): You must not eat or drink after 0700 am that morning.

Do I still take my medication?

You should continue to take your usual medications, including blood thinners, such as Warfarin. You must bring in ALL your medication in with you, as the nursing staff and doctors will need to see them.

What happens when I arrive at the hospital?

Please report to the Department of Cardiac Investigations (also known as Clinic 7) in the Main Outpatients Area on the ground floor, off the main hospital corridor.

On arrival you will be met by a cardiology doctor, nurse, clinical physiologist or a support worker who will be looking after you. They will show you to our checking-in/preparation area and help you to prepare for your test.

You will be asked some questions and have your blood pressure and pulse recorded. You will have the opportunity to ask questions.

A doctor will come and see you to explain the test and then will ask you to sign a consent form agreeing to have the test.

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You will then be accompanied by the member of staff into the procedure room where we perform the scan. This will be a single room; you will be the only patient in this room and will have full privacy.

The staff will bring you a hospital gown. You will be asked by the nurse to remove your shirt or blouse, but underwear may be left on.

A small needle will be inserted into the back of your hand or arm to allow a sedative to be given if required.

How is the TOE done?

The TOE is performed lying on your left side.

Before the procedure, a clip is placed on the fingertip, to monitor your blood oxygen levels.

You may also be given oxygen through a small plastic tube placed in the nostrils. Your heart trace (ECG) will be monitored.

A local anaesthetic spray will be used to numb the back of the throat.

Sedatives (relaxing injections) called Midazolam and in some cases also Fentanyl may be given through the needle in the back of your hand or arm if required.

Immediately prior to the procedure starting, a mouth guard will be used to protect your teeth.

The probe will be placed into your mouth and throat, at this point you will be asked to swallow, allowing it to pass down to the gullet.

Once the probe has been placed into the gullet your doctor will inspect parts of the heart on the screen of the echocardiogram machine. The procedure takes around 20 minutes.

What happens after the test?

Once the procedure is completed, if needed you will then be taken into our recovery area. Here the staff will check your blood pressure and pulse and observe you. You will remain in the recovery area for up to 3 hours to allow any remaining sedation (relaxing injection) to wear off.

If a return to the recovery area is not needed, you can go home straight after the procedure.

Your tongue and throat may feel swollen, similar to the way your lips feel after a local anaesthetic for dental work. Due to this we ask you NOT to eat

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or drink for one hour after the procedure (or until you are able to swallow and cough).

Sometimes the sedative may make it difficult for you to remember details or information as well as usual, so you may wish to have a member of your family present with you for the visit.

Will I know the results of the test?

The scan requires complex analysis and reporting which is done later that day. The report then is sent to your referring consultant who will then be in touch with you with the results and subsequent management plan. We cannot give you full results during your visit.

Going home

Once you have been seen by the doctor you will be discharged home.

It is important to arrange for a family member or friend to drive you home.

You will need someone with you for the first 24 hours after discharge.

You must not drive or operate machinery for 24 hours as you may be given relaxing (sedation) medication.

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February 2021

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Any questions or queries about your procedure, please contact:

Patient Information

Telephone 02476 965767
(Cardiac Bookings)

Web: www.uhcw.nhs.uk

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 02476 965767 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email: feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

Document History

Department: Cardiology
Contact: Dr Jamal Khan- 25670
Produced: March 2021
Review: March 2024
Version: 9
Reference: HIC/LFT/005/06