

## *Echocardiogram (Echo) – What to Know & Expect*

Also referred to as an echocardiogram or cardiac ultrasound, an echo is a painless, non-invasive procedure that uses sound waves to take pictures of the heart ‘in real time’ as it beats to assess both its structure and function. With proper training and sufficient experience, a radiologist can create consistent images of the heart for interpretation by a board-certified cardiologist. In some cases, samples of tissue or fluid will be taken and/or tests repeated after a given period of time to monitor the progress of a condition.

A veterinarian may recommend this test when heart disease is suspected or to monitor the progression of known heart disease. Your pet may receive an echo:

- If they are experiencing symptoms like breathlessness or exercise intolerance.
- To look for the cause of a heart murmur.
- To check the size of the heart chambers.
- To check for fluid around the heart.
- To check that heart muscles are the right thickness and are pumping correctly.

**Preparation:** Read our [Client Preparation Guide](#) to prepare for your pet’s appointment. This procedure requires your pet to remain relaxed and motionless for a period of time. Routine echocardiograms can sometimes be completed without sedation and/or anesthesia; however, the veterinarian may determine that it is clinically necessary. Therefore, it is best to prepare for it. For further information, refer to our [Sedation and Anesthetic Fact Sheet](#). We also recommend all of our clients become familiar with our [Terms and Conditions](#).

**Process:** For scheduled procedures, your pet must be admitted for the day.

1. During admission, we will ask you to sign consent forms for the procedure and address questions you may have.
2. Once admitted, a veterinarian will evaluate your pet, their medical history and lab work, and any radiographs (if applicable).
3. An intravenous catheter may be placed in a leg vein for the administration of anesthetic agents. This requires hair clipping at the site. In rare circumstances, a small area on your pet’s chest may also be shaved to place a patch that monitors heart rate.
4. We must clip patches of hair where the probe is placed on the skin – this allows better images to be obtained. Both sides of the chest behind the front legs will be shaved in a large square area. The skin is cleaned and a clear gel is applied – this also improves the contact between the probe and the skin, giving a better image.
5. Your pet will then be moved to the imaging suite, positioned, and scanned. A specially trained registered veterinary technician will be with your pet during the whole process to monitor their health status. Chest x-rays, ECG, and blood pressure measurements are also obtained.
6. The radiologist will move the probe slowly over your pet’s chest to create consistent images of the heart. During the test, the heart rhythm will be monitored.
7. During the procedure, your pet may be placed in various positions to obtain the best quality pictures.
8. Afterwards, your pet will be brought to our intensive care unit, where a team of veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians will continue to monitor your pet during their recovery.
9. Once a veterinarian has determined that your pet is cleared for discharge, we will call to inform you that your pet is ready to go home.
10. The radiologist will send the images, patient history, and additional testing results to a board-certified cardiologist for interpretation.
11. After evaluating all of the information, the cardiologist will then be able to make any recommendations on treatment, medication, and/or further diagnostics, and will provide a report to your veterinarian within 24 hours. Your veterinarian will discuss the ultrasound findings with you.
12. If additional procedures are required (aspiration or biopsy), you will be contacted prior to the procedure and the benefits/risks and associated costs will be discussed. Any additional results will be forwarded to your veterinarian when they are received.