

ORDINARY, TRANSOESOPHAGEAL AND PHARMACOLOGICAL STRESS ECOCARDIOGRAM

Echocardiogram allows the cavities of the heart, valves, pericardium, arteries and primary veins to be visualised. Importantly, the heart is visualised in movement in real time. Many devices have the capacity to carry out “doppler” examinations, in other words to assess flows within the cavities, vessels and above all through the heart valves, which is extremely useful in the diagnosis of many types of heart disease. In particular, it becomes possible to ascertain the functionality of the valves and the efficacy of the heart’s contraction. It is very useful when following the evolution of the disease and the efficacy of the therapy. It is a non-invasive method, entirely harmless and without pain, and may be repeated as many times as necessary.

In some cases, it may be carried out under physical exertion or with the administration of drugs, in order to document more effectively the heart’s response (contraction, flow through the valves, etc.) when the heart is stimulated and requires more energy.

Alongside the traditional echocardiogram carried out by means of probes attached to the chest, in certain situations it may be necessary to use a particular transoesophageal probe connected by means of a thin tube inserted into the oesophagus, as in the case of gastroscopy. The probe makes it possible to obtain a better definition of the anatomy, especially the posterior part of the heart; it detects the presence of thrombosis inside the atria and yields a perfect anatomical picture of the valves, which is very useful for the surgeon when determining the need for surgery.