

NIH Clinical Center Patient Education Materials

Interventional Radiology: Transesophageal Echocardiogram (TEE)

A transesophageal echocardiogram (TEE) is a diagnostic test that uses sound waves to take a picture of your heart. This type of imaging allows your cardiologist to take clearer pictures than those taken from outside of your chest (such as in transthoracic imaging, or TTE). For this test, your doctor will pass a small, flexible probe through your mouth and into your esophagus. The probe will emit sound waves as it sits in the esophagus directly behind your heart.

Preparation

- Do not eat or drink anything, including water, for at least 8 hours before the test. Your doctor will let you know if you should take your regular medication on the day of the test.
- Tell your doctor if you have any allergies, if you have ever had trouble swallowing, have loose teeth, or wear dentures.
- Tell your doctor if you might be pregnant. A pregnancy test will be done on women of childbearing age.
- If recent blood work has not been completed, you will be asked to have blood drawn to check electrolytes and blood counts.
- Wear comfortable clothing.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form which gives your doctor permission to perform the test. The procedure and any risks involved will be carefully explained to you.
- If you are an outpatient, a responsible adult must come with you to the appointment. This person must also drive you home, or the test will not be performed.

Procedure

- Before the test begins, staff will connect you to equipment that monitors your vital signs. This equipment includes a blood pressure cuff, an ECG (to monitor your heart rate and rhythm), and a finger probe to track your oxygen level. Oxygen and suction will also be available as needed.
- An I.V. (intravenous) line will be placed into your arm. You will get fluids and medications through this line.
- First, your doctor or nurse will numb your throat with an anesthetic spray. The spray lessens your need to gag and helps you swallow the probe. The numbing effect is temporary and will quickly wear off after the test. You will also be given sedation through your I.V. to help you relax.
- A “bite block” (a small piece of plastic with a hole in the middle) will be placed between your teeth. This allows your mouth to stay open during the test.
- You will be asked to lie on your left side and to rest your chin on your chest. When you are in this position, your doctor will pass a tube through the hole in the bite block. You will be asked to swallow. You may feel an urge to gag, but this will go away once the tube is in place. Your saliva will also be suctioned out during the procedure.
- You will be able to breathe normally during the procedure. However, staff will ask you not to talk during the procedure.
- The test usually lasts 20 to 30 minutes. You will be monitored after the test is over, until the effects of sedation have worn off.
- If you are an inpatient, you will go back to your unit, accompanied by a nurse.

- If you are an outpatient, you will be monitored for 60 to 90 minutes after the test. Then, you will be discharged to go home, if you are accompanied by a responsible adult.

After the procedure

- You may be told not to eat or drink for about 4 hours, or until your swallowing reflex comes back to normal. When normal feeling in your throat returns, start taking small sips of water. If you can swallow these easily, you may drink clear liquids first, then eat or drink as usual.
- Your throat may feel slightly sore for a few hours. Ice chips may help soothe your throat.
- If you received sedation during the test, staff will ask you not to drink alcohol for 24 hours.
- Please do not drive or operate hazardous machinery until the day after your test.
- If you had this test as an outpatient, someone must drive you home.

Special Instructions

This information is prepared specifically for persons taking part in clinical research at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and may not apply to patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your health care team. Products/resources named serve as examples and do not imply endorsement by NIH. The fact that a certain product/resource is not named does not imply that such product/resource is unsatisfactory.

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