

Heart tests

Why do I need tests to check my heart?

Some types of cancer treatment can affect the way your heart works. You might have one or more of these tests to check your heart is working normally before, during and after treatment.

Before the tests

These types of tests are done in the outpatient department. The person doing the tests (technician) will tell you what will happen. They might ask you to change into a gown. If you wear a bra, you might need to remove it for the tests.

None of these tests are painful, but you will need to lie still while you are having them.

Electrocardiogram tests (ECG)

This test checks the electrical activity of your heart.

The technician places 12 small, sticky plastic discs onto your chest, arms and legs and attaches a wire to each disc. The wires are linked to a machine that records the electrical activity of your heart. You need to lie still during the test, but it only takes a few minutes.

Echo cardiogram

This test uses ultrasound waves to build up a picture of your heart. You will have an ECG at the same time to check the electrical activity of your heart.

The specialist first places some small, sticky plastic discs onto your chest area for the ECG.

They then move a small device (like a microphone) over the left-hand side of your chest. The device sends out sound waves that create echoes when they bounce off your body. These echoes are picked up by the device and recorded on a machine. The echoes help doctors to know how your heart looks. This is the echo cardiogram test. You may have to lie on your side for some of the test. This test usually takes between 30 and 40 minutes.

Multiple-gated acquisition (MUGA) scan

An MUGA scan looks at how well your heart is pumping blood through your body.

This test usually takes about an hour. There are three main parts to the test:

- two injections
- an electrocardiogram (ECG)
- the scan.

The injections

If you don't have a Hickman® or PICC line, the person doing the test will gently insert a small plastic tube (cannula) into a vein to give you the injections. This is usually in your arm or hand.

They will give you the first injection. After 20 minutes, they will give you the second injection.

Next, you lie on a narrow bed to have an ECG and the scan.

The scan

You lie still on the bed, while a special camera takes pictures of your chest area from different angles.

After tests to check your heart

You can usually go straight home after these tests, unless you are staying in hospital for treatment. You will usually get the test results after a few days, once your doctor has looked at them. Waiting for test results can be a worrying time. Talking to your family and friends about how you feel can help. You can also speak to your doctor or nurse if you have any problems, or need more support.