



# Having a trans-oesophageal echocardiogram (TOE)

Your doctor has decided that you should have a trans-oesophageal echocardiogram. This leaflet explains what it does and how it is carried out.

## Important precautions before the TOE

- ♥ You must **NOT** eat or drink anything for **SIX HOURS** before the test.
- ♥ **Normal medications should be taken** on the morning of the TOE with a small sip of water.
- ♥ If you are on Warfarin, your **INR should have been checked within the preceding 7 days for the results to be available for the test.** Please bring a copy of your prescription with you.
- ♥ If you have diabetes, please inform the nurses as soon as you arrive at the unit.
- ♥ **Please inform the doctor if you have any problems with swallowing; have had any previous surgery to the gullet or stomach, or if you have had any bleeding from your stomach.** This may prevent the TOE from being performed.

## What is it?

- ♥ A trans-oesophageal echocardiogram (TOE) is a heart scan that uses ultrasound (sound waves) to produce images of the heart. The test is usually painless and does not use radioactivity.
- ♥ It involves swallowing a smooth flexible tube as the pictures are taken via the oesophagus (gullet).

## Why is it being done?

- ♥ A TOE allows your doctor to take extremely detailed images of your heart. A TOE is often used to look carefully at the valves and the structure of the heart.
- ♥ The TOE will help the doctor decide on the best treatment for your heart.

## What does it involve?

- ♥ This procedure is performed as a day case.
- ♥ Three people will usually be present: a doctor, a sonographer and an assistant.
- ♥ You will have ECG stickers attached to allow heart monitoring throughout the scan.
- ♥ Your blood pressure will be checked and you will be given oxygen through your nose. You will be able to breathe completely normally throughout the test.
- ♥ You will have local anaesthetic sprayed on the back of your throat.
- ♥ A cannula will be placed in a vein, usually in your arm. If required, you may be given intravenous sedation to relax you, although you will not be completely asleep.
- ♥ If you have dentures, you will be asked to remove them.

- ♥ You will then be asked to lie on your left hand side and, with the help of the operator, swallow the TOE probe. This part may cause discomfort but it is not painful. Recorded images of the heart will then be obtained.
- ♥ Although the duration of the test depends on the complexity of the clinical question, scanning is usually complete within 20 minutes.
- ♥ At the end of the procedure, the tube will be removed, your blood pressure will be checked again, and you will have a short period of recovery.

### **At the end of your echocardiogram**

- ♥ After the TOE, you will be monitored for a short period of recovery. When you are fully alert and the sensation has returned to your throat, you will be allowed a drink.
- ♥ If you have been given sedation, you will be allowed home once you are fully awake – usually 2-3 hours after the procedure. Before you are discharged, the results of the scan will be explained to you.
- ♥ **If you have been given sedation, you should NOT drive or operate heavy machinery for the remainder of the day.** You should be accompanied home by a friend or relative. You can go back to normal activities the following day.

### **Are there any risks in having the TOE?**

Your doctor would not be requesting a TOE unless he or she felt it would help in deciding on the best treatment for your heart. The TOE scan is extremely safe, but there are some risks of which you should be aware:

- ♥ Your throat may feel uncomfortable after the procedure, but this usually settles within 24-48 hours.
- ♥ There is a small risk of damaging the teeth; we will ask you to wear a bite guard during the procedure to minimise this risk.
- ♥ There is a small risk of damaging the gullet, which most commonly manifests as minor and self-limiting bleeding. In very rare circumstances (<1 in 10,000), a major tear can occur in the oesophagus, which may require an operation to repair.
- ♥ There is a small chance of inhaling stomach contents during the procedure. This is why **you MUST NOT eat or drink anything for SIX HOURS before the procedure.**
- ♥ If you have any questions regarding the TOE, please contact the clinical admin team (CAT), or this unit.

### **Useful contacts**

Clinical Admin Team (CAT 11)    0118 322 6676  
Cardiology Reception Enquiries    0118 322 6515  
British Heart Foundation:    [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

This leaflet is printed privately for the Cardiac Fund. It was set up in 1976 the purpose of providing cardiac services that would otherwise not be available through National Health resources. Our Cardiac Laboratory was largely equipped through the fund and many other areas in the Department have also benefited from equipment and staff training.



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