

The nurse or doctor will ask for an ECG (electrocardiograph) to give some further information about your hearts function, this may be able to give a clearer picture to help confirm if there is any problem occurring.

The testing for the echocardiogram will be completed in the cardiology department and the ECG will be completed within the pre op assessment that you are having completed on the day of attending.

Any questions or concerns regarding the tests can be directed to the nurse or doctor requesting the test.

CONTACT US

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*For any other contact numbers contact our
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Patient and Customer Services

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PIL No	SRG10811	Pub Date	Mar 2024	Rev Date	Mar 2026
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HEART MURMURS

PRE-OPERATIVE ASSESSMENT

Patient Information Leaflet

WHAT IS A HEART MURMUR?

The first important thing to note is that a heart murmur is not a diagnosis or an illness and it does not mean there is a problem with your heart.

A heart murmur is an extremely common finding and most murmurs are harmless. However, some can need further investigation and it is often difficult to tell listening to a heart murmur how significant it is.

To explain it simply, a heart murmur is an extra sound heard in your heart. Normally when a doctor or nurse listen to your heart using a stethoscope, they hear a 'lub-dub' sound. These two sounds (the 'lub' and the 'dub') are the normal sounds of the heart valves closing. There are a few extra sounds that can be heard in the heart, but the sound of a murmur is a whooshing sound which is caused by turbulent (flowing backwards and forwards) blood flow through the heart. Heart murmurs can be loud, or soft and can occur at different times during the 'lub-dub' sound.

HEART VALVES EXPLAINED

The heart is a muscular pump, made up of four chambers. These chambers have to pump regularly and in sequence to ensure an adequate blood supply to your whole body. The movement of blood through the heart is regulated by a series of valves which ensure that the blood flows smoothly in a single direction. There are four heart valves within the heart, each one is made up of a thin 'flap' of strong tissue. When the valves are working properly they open and close fully. As valves can only open in one direction this prevents a back flow of blood. If any of the four valves in the heart are diseased or damaged the flow of blood through the heart can be affected and it may not work as efficiently.

TYPES OF HEART MURMURS

Innocent murmurs: Innocent murmurs are often present from childhood. They sometimes disappear as children grow, but many are still present in adulthood. There are no outward signs or symptoms of an innocent heart murmur. Its presence is usually only detected during a routine doctor's examination. These murmurs are completely harmless and people with innocent murmurs have a perfectly normal healthy heart.

People with innocent heart murmurs do not need to make any life changes and should not need any medication. Once it has been confirmed that the murmur is innocent no further tests should be necessary. Innocent heart murmurs are often found during pregnancy, this is due to the extra circulating blood volume found when a woman is pregnant. It means that the blood flow through the heart is naturally more turbulent and noisy. Any condition which might cause blood to flow a little faster through the heart will also cause an innocent murmur, which will usually then disappear once the condition has been corrected. Conditions include anaemia and hyperthyroidism.

Abnormal murmurs: An abnormal murmur in childhood often can be due to a congenital abnormality in the heart. Defects such as small holes in the heart will cause a murmur, as will problems with the heart valves.

A defect in the heart valves is also the commonest cause of abnormal murmur in adults. Some are due to valves that don't allow enough blood through them (sometimes called stenosis) or those that don't close properly and leak extra blood through (sometimes called regurgitation). Stenosis or stiffening of the valves can occur with age, but there is often no reason or explanation for valve problems that develop in adulthood.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF HEART VALVE PROBLEMS INCLUDE:

- *Coronary artery disease:* this can commonly contribute to a leaky heart valve
- *High blood pressure:* this can also contribute to a leaky heart valve
- *Getting older:* age causes the valves to harden and narrow
- *Infection:* can lead to damage causing heart valves to leak
- *Congenital heart problem:* for example being born with an abnormal heart valve
- *Cardiomyopathy:* diseases of the heart muscle
- Rheumatic fever during childhood (or teenage years) used to be the main cause of heart valve damage. However, rheumatic fever is rare now in the UK.

TESTS FOR HEART MURMURS

The most useful test to assess the significance of a heart murmur is an echocardiogram. This is an ultra sound scan of your heart. The test looks at the heart valves and the blood flowing through them, it also assesses the pumping muscle and the overall function of the heart. It gives an assessment of the level of stiffness to the heart valve or leakage to it. An echocardiogram can be arranged by your nurse or doctor. This test involves an appointment about 45 minutes long. You will be required to remove your top clothing and advised to lie onto a bed. The specialist doing the scan will apply some water based gel to your chest area and using an ultrasonic probe on the surface of your skin will scan your heart. This test is not painful and the results will be made available to the requesting nurse or doctor from that day.

More Information Overleaf...