

# A Guide to Transoesophageal Echo (TOE)

## Patient Information - Cardiology

### What is a transoesophageal echo?

A transoesophageal echo (TOE) is a heart scan that uses ultrasound to produce images of the heart. It involves swallowing a soft, flexible tube, as the pictures are taken via the oesophagus (gullet). This produces high quality pictures of the valves and structure of the heart, and will help the doctor make an informed decision on your treatment.

### Why do I need a transoesophageal echo?

Your doctor has requested this procedure to help decide on the best treatment for your heart.

### What does a transoesophageal echo involve?

- This procedure is performed as a day-case, so you will not need to be admitted to hospital for an overnight stay.
- Three people will usually be present to perform the scan, a doctor, a physiologist and a nurse.
- You will have your heart monitored throughout the scan and your blood pressure and oxygen levels will be checked. You may be given oxygen. You will be able to breathe normally throughout the test.
- If you have dentures these will be removed.
- You will have local anaesthetic sprayed on the back of your throat and then asked to lie flat and roll onto your left side.
- A 'drip' will be placed in your arm and you may be given intravenous sedation which is recommended for this procedure.
- Sedation involves giving an injection of small amounts of medication in the back of your hand or arm, which makes you physically and mentally relaxed during a procedure where your cooperation is needed. It will also reduce any anxiety you have about your treatment.

- You will be asked to swallow the TOE probe. This may cause discomfort, but is not painful. Recorded images of the heart will then be obtained. The test will take about 20 minutes.
- At the end of the procedure the tube will be removed, your blood pressure re-checked and you will have a short period of recovery.

### Are there any risks or side effects of the TOE?

TOE is an extremely safe procedure, but there are some risks and side effects to be aware of:

- It is not uncommon to have a sore throat after the procedure; this may last for a day or two.
- Occasionally the throat may bruise or bleed slightly.
- There is a small chance of inhaling stomach contents during the procedure. **It is essential that you have nothing to eat, or drink anything containing milk for six hours before the procedure.**
- There is a small risk (less than 1 in 10,000) of damaging or tearing the gullet. In extreme circumstances this may require an operation to repair the damage.

### What are the risks of sedation?

After the procedure you may feel very sleepy for several hours. Response to sedation varies from one person to another. Your breathing may become very slow. Your doctor or nurse may give you oxygen to help you breathe. Your blood pressure may become lower. If this occurs you may be given intravenous fluids ("put on a drip") for a short time. Some people can feel sick (nauseous) owing to the drugs used in sedation.

### What do I need to do before the test?

- **Please do not have anything to eat, or drink anything containing milk, for 6 hours before the test.**
- **Nothing at all to drink 2 hrs before procedure.** (Small sips of water allowed up to 2 hrs prior to test)
- Normal medications should be taken on the morning of the test with a small sip of water. **Please bring a list of your medication with you.**
- If you are diabetic please inform the nurse on arrival. If you take warfarin, please ensure your INR has been checked within the preceding seven days.
- Please inform the hospital if you have any problems with swallowing, if you have had any bleeding from your stomach, or if you have any loose teeth. This may prevent the TOE from being performed.
- If you have Sickle Cell Disease please inform the hospital as sedation is contraindicated in this condition.

## What happens after the TOE?

- You will be monitored for a short period after the procedure particularly if you have had sedation.
- Due to the sedation you may remember little about what happened and often you will remember nothing.
- After 1 hour, when the sensation in your throat has returned to normal, you may drink cold fluids. Warm fluids and food allowed after 2hrs.
- If you have had sedation you must be accompanied home by a friend or relative and have someone to look after you for the next 24hrs.
- The doctor will prepare a report following the procedure and inform your consultant of the result.

## Discharge advice following Transoesophageal echocardiography (TOE)

You should go straight home and rest for the remainder of the day.

If you have had a sedative we advise that you:

- Must have a responsible person to care for you for 24 hours after the procedure.
- Not drive or operate machinery for 24 hours.
- Not take sole charge of dependants (small children or infirm relatives) for 24 hours.
- Not drink alcohol for 24 hours.
- Not sign any important documentation or make important decisions for 24hrs.

If you have had a throat spray, do not take food or drink that is very hot for the rest of the day (you could burn your throat).

**If you feel unwell on returning home then please contact your GP.**

**If you have any further questions, please contact the Medical Therapy Unit.  
Telephone: 01225 825394**

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