

Physiologist led Valve Clinic

Information and advice for patients

Cardiology Diagnostics

Welcome to the Cardiology Diagnostics Department where we perform a wide range of cardiac investigations. Our staff aim to provide a high quality service to meet your needs and welcome any suggestions for improvements. We hope you find this leaflet helpful and look forward to seeing you.

What is an Echocardiogram?

An echocardiogram is an ultrasound scan of the heart which provides a moving picture on a monitor. It is useful for looking at the overall function, structure and size of your heart and for examining the valves and chambers in detail. It is a very useful tool for investigating various suspected or known heart conditions. Occasionally we may need to inject a special dye called contrast, which will improve the image quality and help with your diagnosis.

What is the Cardiac Physiologist led Valve Clinic?

The Valve Clinic is run by Cardiac Physiologists who are specialised in echocardiography with extensive experience in assessing patients with heart problems including heart valve disease. In addition, our Cardiac Physiologists have completed specialist training in order to conduct this clinic.

The Cardiac Physiologists will work alongside a Consultant Cardiologist who will be available to review patients when necessary to ensure that all patients receive expert specialist care.

What are the benefits of the Cardiac Physiologist led Valve Clinic?

Many patients can live a normal or near-normal life with heart valve disease or replacement heart valves. However, changes in the valve or heart chambers can be treated effectively if detected early enough.

A specialist Valve Clinic, such as the one at Birmingham City and Sandwell Hospitals, can offer expert echo assessment by specialists with extensive experience of examining native (original) and artificial valves. This is vital in detecting complications and early signs of degeneration of the heart valves and of the general condition of the heart.

Early detection of any deterioration in the condition of the heart, or symptoms allows us to offer patients the appropriate treatment at the right time.

By providing specialist follow-up visits in a dedicated clinic and through liaising closely Consultant Cardiologists, GPs and other health professionals, we offer patients with heart valve disease the comprehensive service and treatment needed.

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Clinic times

This clinic is run every Monday morning. Most patients are seen once a year unless more regular reviews are needed. Patients who are clinically stable are offered a follow-up appointment every two years. Some patients may be seen every six months to keep a closer eye on things.

Preparing for the test

Plan to arrive early

We suggest that you arrive early on the day of your appointment to ensure that all the necessary tests are done before your consultation.

Medication

Please continue to take all your medication as usual on the day of your clinic appointment. It is important to remember to bring any medication you usually take during the day with you so you do not miss any doses.

It is also important that you bring a list of all the medication you are currently taking with you to your clinic appointment. We suggest bringing your most recent repeat prescription. This means the Cardiac Physiologist can note the exact name and doses of all your prescribed medication.

If you are taking Warfarin, please bring the yellow anticoagulation record booklet to your appointment so that the Cardiac Physiologist can see how well controlled the international normalised ratio (INR) has been. INR is a laboratory measurement of how long it takes blood to form a clot. It is used to determine the effects of oral anticoagulants on the clotting system.

During the test

You will be shown into a darkened room. There may be up to 3 members of the Cardiology team present during your test. It would be helpful if you know your correct weight and symptoms (if any).

You should expect to be in the department for no more than 90 minutes.

When you arrive for your appointment, please do not use the self check-in screens at the out-patients reception desk, come directly to CARDIOLOGY DIAGNOSTICS DEPARTMENT which is situated on the FIRST FLOOR of the BIRMINGHAM TREATMENT CENTRE.

If possible, we suggest that you arrive early to ensure there is enough time to complete all the tests before your clinic appointment.

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Tests

Before your consultation with the Cardiac Physiologist, we will carry out some tests to check the condition of your replacement valve and see how well your heart is working. Tests may include:

- **Electrocardiogram (ECG)** - a test using small electrodes attached to the arms, legs and chest that show the rhythm and electrical activity of the heart. Patients will usually have their ECG immediately before their echo in the same department.

We may also carry out some tests after your consultation with the Cardiac Physiologist. These may include:

- **Blood tests** - to check full blood count, kidney and liver function, iron studies, clotting studies (including INR if patient is taking Warfarin), glucose, cholesterol and BNP levels. The blood test department (phlebotomy) is also located on the Ground Floor of the Birmingham Treatment Centre. The Cardiac Physiologist will give patients a completed form to take to this department following the consultation.
- **Chest X-ray** - to check your heart, lungs and chest wall. If an X-ray is needed, the Cardiac Physiologist can arrange for it to be taken immediately after the consultation.

Consultation

Your Cardiac Physiologist will discuss any change in your symptoms, medication and general health since your last follow-up appointment.

During a brief physical check-up, we will take your blood pressure, weight, heart rate, listen to your heart and lungs, and check for any signs of heart failure including ankle swelling.

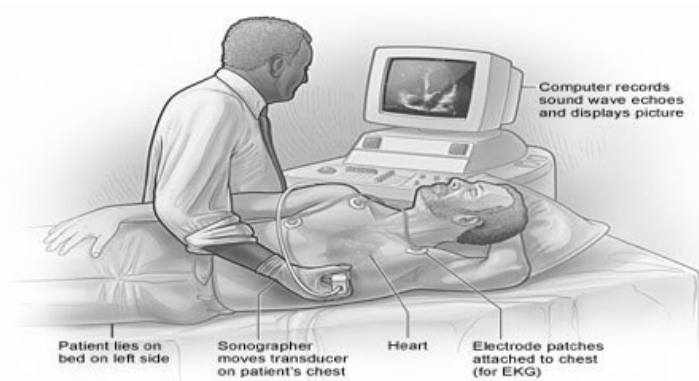
The Cardiac Physiologist will perform an Echocardiogram (echo) – this is an ultrasound scan to measure the size and function of your heart and to check how well your heart and heart valves are working. You will need to undress to the waist and will be given a gown to wear to maintain your dignity.

A member of the team will ask you to lie on a couch. A few small ECG stickers will be attached to your chest and connected to the echo machine. These will be used to monitor your heart rate. Whilst lying on your left hand side, pictures of your heart will be recorded by placing the ultrasound probe with gel onto your chest area. Please note that it is often necessary to position the probe around and under the left breast.

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Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

We also provide advice to promote good heart health and help you live as healthy a life as possible.

After your consultation, the Cardiac Physiologist will inform you of when your next appointment in the Physiologist led Valve Clinic will be.

What do I feel during the test?

You might find it uncomfortable when the Cardiac Physiologist applies pressure on your chest area with the ultrasound probe.

After the test

Once the scan is complete you will be given some tissue to remove the gel from your chest area. Sometimes whilst a Consultant Cardiologist reviews the images and he/she may come into the clinic to speak with you.

What happens next?

Your Cardiac Physiologist will write a letter to yourself and your GP detailing your results, clinical examination, medications and any further actions needed, such as a change in medication. Your Consultant Cardiologist will receive a copy of this letter.

The Cardiac Physiologist will discuss any issues or concerns that arise during the clinic with the clinical lead, Dr Stavros Apostolakis, and any other relevant consultants.

Some patients may need further tests that will be arranged for another date, such as an ECG holter monitor test to check irregular rhythms of the heart. Occasionally other tests such as CT scans or MRI scans may also be arranged. If these tests are needed, it will be discussed with you in more detail.

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Contact details

You will be able to ask any questions or tell us any concerns before the test is carried out but if you would like to contact us before your appointment please call us on:

Birmingham Treatment Centre Telephone: 0121 507 6295

Sandwell General Hospital Telephone: 0121 507 3512

Lines open: 9am till 4pm Monday to Friday

Additionally if you have any change in symptoms please either call the department on the numbers above or Dr Apostolakis (Consultant Cardiologist) on 0121 507 5634

Suggestions

In order to continually improve our service we welcome your feedback and suggestions. We would be grateful if you would complete our Friends and Family survey at the end of your appointment.

Complaints

If you have any complaints about the treatment you have received, please ask at reception to see the Head of Department. Alternatively you can contact, Informal Concern or the complaints department.

Informal Concern

Telephone: 0121 507 5836

Lines open: 10am till 4pm Monday to Friday

Email: swb-tr.pals@nhs.net

Complaints

Telephone: 0121 507 4080 or 0121 507 5892 or 0121 507 6440

Lines open: 10am till 4pm Monday to Friday

Email: swbh.complaints@nhs.net

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website www.swbh.nhs.uk, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

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Sources used for the information in this leaflet

British Heart Foundation (2017) *Tests for heart conditions*. Available at: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/tests> (Accessed 23 February 2023).

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Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Foundation Trust (2018) *Heart Valve Clinic*. Available at: <https://www.rbht.nhs.uk/our-services/heart/heart-valve-clinic> (Accessed 23 February 2023).

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