

Patent Foramen Ovale (PFO)

A patent foramen ovale (PFO) is a hole in the heart that didn't close the way it should have after birth.

PFO is not uncommon, and most people would be unaware they have it.

PFO is often discovered during tests for other problems. Most people never need treatment for this problem unless it becomes associated with medical symptoms.

Assessment for the presence of PFO is useful when investigating unexplained Stroke, TIA (Transient Ischaemic Attack) or a heart attack caused by a blood clot. Severe migraine, with or without aura, and decompression illness.

For Dr Pascoe to correctly diagnose a PFO, she will request tests such as an Echocardiogram and a Transcranial Doppler.

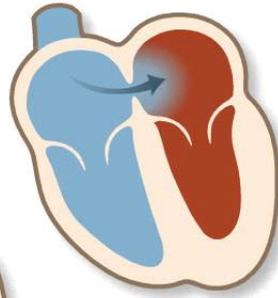
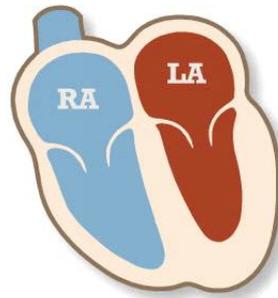
Transcranial Doppler – is an ultrasound examination of cranial arteries following an injection of agitated saline with bubbles. If there is an opening in the heart, bubbles will be detectable by transcranial doppler.

Echocardiogram - is an ultrasound of the heart, often referred to as an Echo that can give accurate pictures of the heart muscle, the heart chambers and structures within the heart such as the valves. Often an Echo will not detect PFO but it is important to look at the structures of the heart to make sure there are no other abnormalities.

After the tests are performed Dr Pascoe will discuss the results with you and how they may be associated with your symptoms. Sometimes the PFO is small and is an incidental finding. Other times the PFO may be significant and the cause of the symptoms that you are seeing Dr Pascoe for.

Should Dr Pascoe feel the PFO is an important contributor to your medical problems she will discuss referring you to a Cardiologist who specialises in PFO for further assessment and possible treatment.

A simplified view of a PFO



In a normal heart (left), the foramen ovale has closed, separating the right atrium (RA) from the left atrium (LA); in a heart with a PFO, venous blood leaks from the right atrium into the left atrium, then out to the body

**If there is an opening, then blood moves incorrectly into the left side
of the heart and through the body**

Photo Courtesy of American Heart Foundation