

# Contrast Echocardiography

A patient's guide

Your doctor has decided that you should have a Contrast Echocardiogram.

### **What is it?**

An echocardiogram or 'echo' is a scan that uses ultrasound (sound waves) to produce pictures of the heart. The test is painless and does not use radioactivity.

During a contrast echo a contrast agent is injected which improves the quality of the images that are being recorded.

### **Why is it being done?**

If your doctor has decided that you need an Echocardiogram, but the picture quality is not very good, a contrast agent can be used to help improve the images.

A contrast echo is also used to help diagnose if you have any holes in the heart.

### **What does it involve?**

You will be taken into a darkened room. One or two people will usually be present. The person performing the test is called a Sonographer, who may be male or female.

The sonographer will usually NOT be a doctor. This means that some questions you may have about the result may have to wait until you see your doctor in clinic.

You will be asked to undress to the waist and put on a gown that should be left open to the front. You will be asked to lie on a couch on your left hand side.

Stickers will be attached to your chest and connected to the machine. These will be used to monitor your heart rate during the test. A cannula may be placed in the vein in your arm, if the doctor needs to inject contrast which improves the quality of the images recorded.

The sonographer will record a number of pictures of the heart. Whilst this is happening, a contrast agent will be injected into the drip to improve the quality of the images.

If the doctor is looking for the presence of a hole in the heart, you may be asked to cough and sniff whilst the images are being recorded.

The echocardiogram will take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete but may take longer.

**Are there any special precautions that I need to take before the echocardiogram?**

No. You can take all your medication as normal. You can eat and drink as normal.

**Are there any risks in having the contrast echo?**

There is an extremely small risk (less than 1 in 10,000) of developing an allergic reaction to some of the contrast agent we may use.

**If you have had allergic reactions to any medicines before please inform us before starting the test.**

**At the end of your echocardiogram**

Once the echocardiogram is complete you can get dressed and leave. There are no limitations to what you can do after the scan, for example, you may drive.

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