



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Contrast Echocardiography

Issued by the cardiology department

Your doctor has decided that you should have a contrast echocardiogram.

What is it?

- ♥ An echocardiogram or 'echo' is a scan that uses ultrasound 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. In this case the scan can also be referred to as 'bubble contrast echo'.

What does it involve?

- ♥ You will be taken into a darkened room. 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. The second person in the room may be either a doctor or a specialist nurse.
- ♥ 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. If you require a chaperone, you may bring a friend or relative. Alternatively, the hospital may provide a chaperone at your request. If you require a chaperone provided by the hospital can you please advise the department before you attend so this can be arranged.

- ♥ 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 will be placed in your arm.
- ♥ The sonographer will record a number of pictures of the heart. Whilst this is happening, a small amount (typically a few milliliters) of contrast agent will be injected into the cannula to improve the quality of the images. If the doctor has asked the sonographer to look for the presence of a hole in the heart, you may be asked to cough and sniff whilst the images are being recorded. For this type of scan tiny air bubbles will be injected into your circulation.
- ♥ The echocardiogram will take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete.

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.

At the end of your echocardiogram

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

Are there any risks in having the contrast echo?

There is an extremely small risk (less than 1 in 1,000) of developing an allergic reaction to the contrast agent used. If you have had allergic reactions to any medicines before please inform us before starting the test.

If you have any further questions please contact the number provided on your appointment letter.

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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