

Having a contrast echocardiogram

Your doctor has decided that you should have a contrast echocardiogram. This leaflet explains what it does and how it is carried out.

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 (dye) is injected into a vein in your arm 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 echo, but the picture quality is not very good, a contrast agent can be used to help improve the images.
- ♥ A contrast echo can therefore be useful to establish the pump function of your heart, help diagnose if you have a clot in your heart or to take a more detailed look at the structure of certain parts of your heart.

What does it involve?

- ♥ You will be taken into a darkened room. One or two people will usually be present, with one of them being a doctor or a trained sonographer.
- ♥ 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 echo machine. These will be used to monitor your heart rate during the test. A cannula will be placed in a vein, usually in your arm.
- ♥ We will record a number of pictures of the heart. While this is happening, a contrast agent will be injected into the cannula to improve the quality of the images.
- ♥ The echocardiogram will take approximately 20 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 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 10,000) 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.**
- ♥ You are likely to get a small bruise where the cannula is sited..

Where will the test take place?

- ♥ You will need to attend the Cardiac Department, Level 1, Battle Block at the date and time mentioned on the attached letter. **We would be grateful if you could arrive 15 minutes before your stated appointment time.**
- ♥ If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the department on 0118 322 6515.

Useful contacts

Royal Berkshire Hospital 0118 322 5111
Cardiac Reception Enquiries 0118 322 6515
British Heart Foundation: www.bhf.org.uk
West Berkshire Heart Support Group – ‘Heartbeats’
Heartbeats website: www.heartbeats-berkshire.co.uk

More information is available on the Trust website www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Department of Cardiology, December 2017.
Review due: December 2019