

Cardio-oncology echocardiogram

What is a cardio-oncology echocardiogram?

An echocardiogram or 'echo' is a scan that uses ultrasound (sound waves) to produce pictures of the heart.

An echo can now be performed specific to the needs of an oncology echo referral. This is due to recent guidelines published by the British Society of Echocardiography and improvements in NHS services.

Some patients undergoing oncology treatment require an echo prior to the start of treatment, and sometimes require interval echos to monitor their treatment. The echo will involve specific focused measurements to be taken. Additionally (at the time of the echo and following current guidance), if the technician/doctor thinks that the picture quality is not good enough to obtain these measurements accurately, a **contrast echo** can be performed. This will be discussed with you and your verbal consent will need to be given.

What is a contrast echo?

A contrast echo is a scan that uses ultrasound to produce pictures of the heart, but if the picture quality is not adequate, a contrast agent can be used to help improve the images that are being recorded.

Contrast agents are commonly used during echo scans and consist of very tiny bubbles of gas which are breathed out. This contrast is not the same as those used in CT scans or MRI scans, and it has no effect on your kidneys.

What does a contrast echo involve?

A contrast echo is usually carried out by two cardiac physiologists/cardiac sonographers, and sometimes by a doctor and a physiologist/sonographer. You will be asked some questions to establish whether or not the contrast is suitable for you and verbal consent will be taken.

If contrast is deemed appropriate for you, a small cannula (thin tube) will be placed into a vein in your arm or hand - this will feel similar to having a blood test. The contrast agent and saline (flush) are injected into the cannula whilst echo images and measurements are taken of your heart. When the test is complete (usually 20-40mins) the cannula will be removed.

Are there special precautions I need to take before having an echo?

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

What happens at the end of the contrast echo appointment?

You are free to leave. There are no limitations to what you can do after the scan, for example, you may drive.

Are there any risks to having the contrast echo?

There is an extremely small risk (less than 1 in 10,000) of experiencing an allergic reaction to the contrast agent used. If this happens, it will be treated within the department. Before starting the test, you will be asked if you have a history of allergic reactions. There is also a small risk of bruising from the insertion of the cannula.

Getting your results

The results of the test will be sent to the requesting consultant within the hospital. This doctor, or a member of his team, will be in contact with the results.

Further information and support

Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre, Lister Hospital

Situated at the main entrance to the Lister Hospital.

Drop-in centre and telephone helpline for any questions relating to cancer:

- Telephone 01438 284657 (Monday to Friday, 10am - 4pm, excluding bank holidays)
- Email - macmillaninfosupport.enh-tr@nhs.net

NHS website for England

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/echocardiogram

Useful contact details

East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk
- Telephone 01438 314333

Cardiology Reception, Lister Hospital:

- Telephone 01438 286159

Leaflet information

You can request this information in a different format or another language; please speak to your doctor or nurse.

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