

## Echocardiogram

### What is an echocardiogram?

An echocardiogram (echo) is an ultrasound study of your heart muscle, heart valves and pericardium (sac surrounding the heart). The test uses sound waves to see how well your heart is working.

A wand-like instrument makes the sound waves. As the wand is moved over your chest, pictures of the heart appear on a screen and are recorded digitally. The test takes about 30-45 minutes.

### Before the Test

- You may eat and drink as usual before the test.
- You may take your regular medicines before the test.

### During the Test

- You will be asked to undress down to your waist and put on a gown.
- You will lie on your left side on a bed. This helps move your lungs from in front of your heart so the sound waves can reach your heart.
- The technician will put a gel on the ultrasound wand before putting it on your chest. Pictures of your heart are taken from different places on your chest.
- The exam room lighting will be darkened so the technician can see the screen on the ultrasound machine.
- You may need an echocardiogram with bubble study. This may be done before or during your echo.
  - A nurse will start an intravenous (IV) line on your arm.
  - The saline (salt water) solution will be injected into the IV
  - The saline is then seen on the ultrasound as it flows through your heart. This is not painful.
- You may need an echocardiogram with contrast (Definity). This is done only if the first echo images are not clear.
  - After taking a brief history, a nurse will insert an IV catheter into your arm.
  - A small amount of Definity will be injected into the IV one or more times during the echo.

## After the Test

- A doctor at the hospital will look at the recorded echo and send the results to your doctor.
- If you do not hear from your doctor within one week after the test, call his or her office for results.
- If an IV was started, the nurse will remove the IV catheter and put a bandage on the site.