

## **CARDIAC TESTS: ECHOCARDIOGRAM**

### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **What is an echocardiogram?**

An echocardiogram (or “echo”) is a test that uses sound waves to take pictures of the heart. A specially trained technician places a small, plastic microphone-like device against the chest. This device sends ultrasound waves that bounce off different parts of the heart and create an image of your heart on a computer screen. An echocardiogram can help your physician diagnose problems with your heart and heart valves and plan your treatment.

#### **What do I need to do to prepare for an echocardiogram?**

No special preparation is required, unless recommended specifically by your physician.

#### **How is an echocardiogram performed?**

Specially trained technicians will perform the echocardiogram.

- This test takes about a half-hour or longer to complete, depending on the type of echo and the number of views that your physician orders. This test has no side effects and does not hurt.
- Small pads called electrodes are placed on your chest and shoulders to monitor your heartbeat.
- You will be asked to lie on your back. During an echo, you may be asked to change your position and/or to exhale for a few seconds.
- A small amount of cool, colorless gel is placed on your chest to improve the quality of the images. The microphone-like device (or transducer) then glides over the gel and takes the image/picture.
- The images are recorded on videotape or printed out and evaluated by your physician.

## **What is a “doppler echo”?**

A doppler echo is a special kind of echo that allows your physician to see the flow of blood through your heart. The computer may make a swooshing or pulsating sound during the test.

## **What is an “exercise echo”?**

An exercise echo is a special kind of echo that allows your physician to see how the heart functions before and after exercise.

- Generally an initial echo is performed before exercise.
- Next you will be asked to walk on a treadmill for a few minutes or you will be given medication to simulate the effect of exercise on the body.
- A follow-up echo is then completed immediately after the exercise while your heart is beating rapidly.

If you have any additional questions about your echocardiogram, please ask your nurse or physician.

*For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education.*