Contrast Echocardiography

What Is It?
In Contrast Echocardiography a substance known as "contrast" is used to enhance visualization of the heart. The contrast material itself is a diluted solution of normal saline and very small microspheres (smaller than red blood cells) composed of a nonactive/inert gas encased in a lipid shell. "Contrast" is not an iodine-based "dye" that is typically used for x-rays; consequently, it does not produce the same type of allergic reactions or other side effects. In fact, side effects are very rare and may include some back pain that typically goes away within minutes. The inert gas is simply exhaled through the lungs and the lipid shell is broken down through the usual metabolic pathways of the body.

The use of contrast during an echo does not necessarily mean, "something is wrong." It simply means that the cardiac sonographer would like to provide the Cardiologist with clearer images of the heart. Some hearts are more difficult to image, depending upon an individuals body habitus. Contrast can circumvent this difficulty. It is especially useful in stress and dobutamine echocardiograms.

What Will Happen During the Test?
The cardiac sonographer will inform you that he or she would like to improve the image quality by using contrast. A RN will then start an IV and inject approximately 2 ml of the diluted contrast solution. The sonographer will then obtain additional moving images of your heart. Once the images are stored, the RN will then remove the IV and bandage the area. The contrast that was injected will dissipate within your body within approximately two to three minutes.