Right Heart Catheterization

What is a right heart catheterization?
In a right heart catheterization, a doctor will place a catheter (a thin plastic tube) into one of the larger veins in either your neck (right or left side), arm (inside elbow) or leg (right or left groin area). The procedure lasts about 30 minutes. It is done in the UW Hospital Heart and Vascular Care Procedure Center in the Cardiac Catheterization Lab. The procedure takes about 30 minutes. You will be asked to take off your street clothes and put on a hospital gown. Then you will lie on an x-ray table. X-ray equipment is used to help the doctor place the catheter in the proper place in your body. A nurse will clean the area over your procedure site. The nurse will cover the rest of your body with sterile drapes. Medicines will be given through an IV to help you relax. The doctor will numb the skin with a local anesthetic. When this is done you may feel pressure at the site, but should not feel sharp pain. The doctor will then insert the catheter into your neck, arm, or groin vein.

You will not feel any of this during the procedure. A number of blood pressure and blood flow measurements are then taken in different places in your heart and lungs. Drugs may be given, either by IV or by inhalation, and you may be asked to exercise by using a small arm or leg exercise machine. This is followed by more measurements to assess your body’s response to the drugs or exercise. When all of these measurements are complete, the catheter is removed. A bandage will be placed over the site. You will then return to your hospital room.

Why is this procedure done?
This study may be done for many reasons, including to:
- Measure the amount of fluid in your blood vessels.
- Measure the pressures in your heart and lungs.
- Learn how well your heart or lungs are working.
- Help your doctors decide which drugs would be best for you.

This study is done on patients with heart failure and many other heart or lung conditions. It is performed in:
- Patients being evaluated for heart or lung transplant.
- Patients on the waiting list for a heart or lung transplant.
- Patients having a heart biopsy after their heart transplant.
- Patients with high blood pressure in the lungs.
- Patients who are short of breath for unknown reasons.
Prior To Your Procedure
A procedure nurse will call you a few days prior to your procedure to provide your pre-procedure patient instructions and procedure information. General instructions include:

- Showering the evening before or morning of your procedure
- Nothing to eat or drink after midnight the night before your procedure.
- Making arrangements for a driver to take you home
- Bringing all of your medicines with you in their original bottles, including any inhalers or over the counter medicines / supplements.
- Bringing your CPAP or BIPAP machine with hoses and mask if you use a machine at night to sleep.

You will also be instructed about what pills to take the morning of your procedure with a few sips of water. Your nurse coordinator will talk about all of this with you.

On The Day of Your Right Heart Catheterization Procedure:
The doctor or nurse will go over the test with you. They will:

- Explain why you are having the test.
- Tell you about the risks involved.
- Discuss what vein the doctor will plan to use for the test.
- Explain if there are other options to the test.
- Answer any questions that you may have.

You will be asked to sign a consent form. Signing this form gives the doctor permission to do the procedure on you. Be sure to ask any questions before signing the form.

Friends and family will be shown to a waiting area while you are in the test. They will rejoin you after the test is done.

After your Procedure:

- Remove your bandage 24 hours after your procedure and shower by letting soap and water flow over your procedure site. Do not rub your procedure site excessively when you dry off. Do not put any lotions, powders, or perfumes / colognes on the procedure site. Our goal is for your procedure site to be clean and dry while it heals.
- Take your usual medicines and return to your normal diet unless told not to by your doctor.
- Avoid strenuous activity for the rest of the day.

If you bleed at the site, hold firm pressure on the area for a few minutes with a piece of dry gauze without letting go and call the UW Heart Failure/Transplant Office right away if your bleeding does not stop after constant pressure is held for a few minutes, or if you notice shortness of breath, pain, or other symptoms you did not have before your procedure.