

Pregnancy Ultrasound

Patient Information



What is a pregnancy ultrasound?

An Ultrasound examination is a widely used technique which provides detailed images of the body. Ultrasound uses high frequency sound waves, which are bounced back from parts of the body, to create an image which can quite often be displayed on the screen of the ultrasound machine for the patient to view, and the image shows images in “real time” and as a moving image.

Since its introduction ultrasound has provided a dramatic improvement in obstetric care, making pregnancy safer to mothers, and permitting early intervention for life threatening congenital abnormalities in babies.

The sound energy used is absorbed by the body as heat, but there is no noticeable warming effect. There are no known harmful effects for either the mother or the baby.

The Sonographer uses a hand-held device which produces and receives the sound waves which are then converted into an image.

For General Ultrasound and Nuchal Translucency Ultrasound information please see the relevant Patient Examination Fact Sheet.

Why are you having this examination?

There are many reasons why your Doctor may send you for an Ultrasound examination during your pregnancy.

In the early stages of pregnancy (less than 12 weeks) an ultrasound may be performed if there has been bleeding or pain, if you are uncertain about the date of your last period, or if there is excessive nausea or vomiting. At this time we can confirm that the foetus is developing within the womb and we are able to check the number of babies. We are also able to measure the length of the foetus to estimate the stage of pregnancy and the due date of delivery. It should be noted that in this stage the foetus is usually too small for us to see arms, legs and body parts clearly. However, the heart beat can be seen at about 6 weeks.

Between 11 and 14 weeks, Nuchal Translucency Ultrasound can be performed. This test assesses the risk of chromosomal abnormalities by measuring the thickness of the skin fold on the back of the neck of the foetus.

A blood test is also required and the results compiled, taking into account your age, to give a risk of your foetus having a chromosomal abnormality.

As your pregnancy progresses, your Doctor will usually send you for an ultrasound examination to check the appearance of the foetus with the hope of identifying any abnormalities. This examination is usually performed when the foetus has grown to about 12cm long, at about 18 to 20 weeks. At this stage, we also check where the placenta is developing and we routinely take measurements of the foetus to confirm that growth is progressing normally. Images of the foetus in the womb. We will be given to you on a CD for your keeping free of charge.

Sometimes your Doctor will send you for an ultrasound examination after 20 weeks if there has been difficulty in seeing the foetus on a previous examination or if there is any concern that the foetus is not growing, or positioning of the placenta.

Can Ultrasound identify all abnormalities?

Unfortunately, there are still many abnormalities that cannot be identified with ultrasound. Depending on the position of the foetus within the womb, some areas of the foetus may be difficult or impossible to see. Also, if there has been previous surgery or scarring in the mother's abdomen, or if the mother is of heavy build, the examination will not give good detail.

Many parents hope that the ultrasound will prove that their foetus will not have Down Syndrome or other major abnormality. In fact, many Down Syndrome babies appear absolutely normal and are impossible to detect with ultrasound alone.

Your appointment details

Date

Time

Location

Down Syndrome and other chromosome abnormalities can only be accurately diagnosed using invasive tests such as amniocentesis.

Ultrasound can never guarantee that your foetus will be normal.

What preparation is required?

Empty bladder 1 hour before the appointment, then immediately drink 1 litre of water. You may continue to empty your bladder up to ½ an hour before the appointment.

Most scans do not involve any medication. Some patients will be given a small injection into a vein to improve information on the images. Do not be concerned if you are given an injection, as with some examinations this is routine procedure.

What documentation is required?

Bring your referral and any relevant previous xrays for comparison.

Also bring your Medicare card, Pension or Healthcare Card or Veteran's Affairs card details if applicable.

What you must tell us prior to your appointment?

If you have diabetes and are on insulin, or suffer epilepsy, please discuss these conditions with our booking staff, as the timing of the examination may be affected.

What will happen during the examination?

You may be asked to change into a gown. A clear jelly will be applied to skin and a plastic probe is moved over the skin above the area being examined. Multiple images are taken throughout the examination. The operator (known as a Sonographer) will be with you throughout the scan, and may ask you questions in relation to your current medical issue. Obtaining the best images can be a challenge, and can demand notable time and effort on behalf of the Sonographer.

Sometimes a mother will be asked to return for another examination on a separate day usually because the position of the foetus in the womb prevents us from seeing it clearly. This is performed at no additional charge, and every effort is made to make a convenient appointment time.

How long with the examination take?

The time required for the ultrasound will vary greatly depending on the complexities of the situation. At a minimum some scans will take 15 minutes whilst some more involved scans may take up to an hour.

What can you expect after your examination?

There should be no ill effects after the examination. The gel is simply wiped from your skin. As it is water soluble it is easily washed from the skin and/or clothes.

Are there any risks?

Ultrasound scans utilise high-frequency sound waves (mechanical vibrations) when producing images. No ionizing radiation is used.

Ultrasound has been used in medicine since the 1950's and there have been no confirmed adverse effects attributed to diagnostic ultrasound exposure in this time.

Ultrasound should only be used for strictly medical purposes by suitably qualified health professionals.

What happens with the images and reports?

Normally a report of the results of your ultrasound will be available to you and your Doctor on the same day. If the results are urgently needed, they will be communicated immediately by telephone to your Doctor, followed by an emailed or typed report within one hour.

We will store digital copies of all studies and reports on our secure patient information system for comparison with any future examinations.

