



## Ultrasound Scanning in Pregnancy

What is ultrasound scanning?

Ultrasound scanning is a procedure that uses high frequency sound waves to create a picture of soft, fluid-filled organs.

When is it used in pregnancy?

Ultrasound scanning is used in pregnancy to examine the uterus, the amniotic sac, the placenta, and the unborn baby during various stages of growth.

In many situation, ultrasound is used when complication is suspected or when you have risk factors that could lead to a complication with the baby. Not all doctors use ultrasound routinely, although it is becoming very common and is definitely needed for many abnormal conditions. Sometimes the genitals can be seen in the ultrasound scans after the 20<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy, but this is not a reason to get the test.

Ultrasound scanning is used in pregnancy for the following reasons:

- To make sure the baby is developing in the uterus and not inside the fallopian tube (ectopic pregnancy)
- To determine how far along you are in your pregnancy
- To check that the baby is growing normally
- To estimate the weight of the baby
- To locate the placenta and see if it is normal and attached properly
- To check the position of the baby, and see if he/she is head down, bottom first, or lying sideways
- To check if the baby has any major abnormalities
- To check the amount of fluid around the baby inside of the uterus
- To see how many babies are in the uterus (see if you have twins, triplets, or more)
- To check the baby's heart
- To look for fetal movement and breathing movements of the chest
- To get accurate measurements of the baby, including
  - The length of the thigh bone
  - The diameter of the head
  - The size of the abdomen

An ultrasound can help the doctor for different reasons at various stages in the pregnancy. Tests to determine if the baby is growing at a normal rate are most accurate if done between your 20<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> weeks of pregnancy. To check the age of the baby and rule out possibility of twins, an ultrasound is done

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between 16 and 20 weeks.

How do I prepare for ultrasound scanning?

In general, there are no specific preparations for this procedure. Often it is helpful if your bladder is full so the doctor can view the picture more easily, so do not go to the bathroom before the test. If this preparation or any other is necessary, your doctor will give you specific instructions.

What happens during the procedure?

During an ultrasound, high frequency sound waves enter your body through an ultrasound transducer (microphone-like device) that is placed on your abdomen. A liquid-jelly is usually applied to the skin to improve the contact between the transducer and your skin. At the other end, the transducer is connected to a computer with a display screen. As the sound waves pass through the body, they are reflected by the organ and create echoes. The computer converts these echoes into numerical data, displays this data on the monitor, analyzes them, and produces an image of the organ. By moving the transducer over different parts of your abdomen, the doctor can scan the entire uterus and the baby.

The scan takes about 15 minutes and is painless. You can watch the images on the screen as they appear. Many ultrasound examinations, especially early in the pregnancy, are done by the vaginal route. The transducer shaped like a narrow tube is inserted gently into the vagina and images appear on the screen.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor immediately if you have any change or worsening of pain or symptoms.

Call the doctor during office hours if:

- You have questions about the procedure or its results
- You want to make another appointment

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