Patient Information

Pregnancy Ultrasound

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 to create an image which is displayed on the screen of the ultrasound machine in real time. There are no known harmful effects for either the mother or the baby.

Why do I need a pregnancy ultrasound?

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.

As your pregnancy progresses, your Doctor will usually send you for an ultrasound examination to check the appearance of the foetus to try to identify any abnormalities. This examination is usually performed about 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. We will give you these images 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 may not give good detail.

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.

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 need to tell us prior to your appointment?

If known you will need to inform us of your estimated due date of delivery. This ensures that your booking can be made at the appropriate stage of your pregnancy.

Also, please inform us if you know that you are pregnant with a multiple pregnancy (twins etc.) so that a longer appointment time can be scheduled.

What will happen during the examination?

We will place ultrasound gel on your skin so that we can visualise your baby and its placenta.

How long will 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 should only be used for strictly medical purposes by suitably qualified health professionals.

What happens with the images and report?

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