

PREGNANCY ULTRASOUND



Patient: What is pregnancy ultrasound?

Doctor: A pregnancy ultrasound is an imaging test that uses sound waves to see how a baby is developing in the womb. It is also used to check the female pelvic organs during pregnancy.

Patient: Why is it performed?

Doctor: Some doctors order an ultrasound when they think there may be a problem with the pregnancy or if there is a question about how far along the pregnancy is.

A pregnancy ultrasound may be done in the first trimester to:

- Confirm a normal pregnancy
- Determine the baby's age
- Look for problems, such as ectopic pregnancies or the chances for a miscarriage
- Determine the baby's heart rate
- Look for multiple pregnancies (twins, triplets, etc.)
- Identify problems of the placenta, uterus, cervix, and ovaries

A pregnancy ultrasound may also be done in the second and third trimesters to:

- Determine the baby's age, growth, position, and sometimes gender
- Identify any developmental problems
- Look for multiple pregnancies (twins, triplets, etc.)
- Look at the placenta, amniotic fluid, and pelvis

Some centers are now performing a pregnancy ultrasound around 9 - 13 weeks of pregnancy to look for signs of Down syndrome or other developmental problems in the developing baby. This test is often combined with blood tests to improve the accuracy of results.

Patient: What are the risks for this test?

Doctor: Current ultrasound techniques appear to be safe, and there is no documented risk to women or their developing babies. Ultrasound does not involve radiation, such as that used when taking an x-ray.

Patient: What are some preparations needed for the test?

Doctor: A full bladder is necessary to get a good picture. Therefore, you may be asked to drink 2 to 3 glasses of liquid an hour before the test. You should not urinate before the procedure.

Patient: How is the test performed?

Doctor: You will lie down for the procedure. The person performing the test places a clear, water-based gel on your belly and pelvis area and then moves a hand-held probe over the area. The gel helps the probe transmit sound waves. These waves bounce off the body structures, including the developing baby, to create a picture on the ultrasound machine.

In some cases, a pregnancy ultrasound may be done by placing the probe into the vagina which is called transvaginal ultrasound.

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Patient: How will I feel during the test doctor?

Doctor: There may be some discomfort from pressure on the full bladder. The conducting gel may feel slightly cold and wet. You will not feel the ultrasound waves.

Patient: If I get an abnormal result, what does it mean?

Doctor: Abnormal ultrasound results may be due to some of the following conditions:

- Birth defects
- Ectopic pregnancy
- Intrauterine growth restriction
- Multiple pregnancies
- Miscarriage
- Problems with the baby's position in the womb
- Problems with the placenta, including placenta previa and placental abruption
- Too little amniotic fluid
- Too much amniotic fluid (polyhydramnios)
- Tumors of pregnancy, including gestational trophoblastic disease
- Other problems with the ovaries, uterus, and remaining pelvic structures

QUESTIONS:

1. Can you tell me what ectopic pregnancy is?
2. What is the difference between placenta previa and placental abruption?
3. What is Down Syndrome?