

Patient information

Ultrasound scan obstetrics (pregnancy)

Radiology department

Introduction

We hope this guide will answer your questions about your obstetric (pregnancy) ultrasound scan. Please contact the team if you require further information via the details at the end of this leaflet.

If, for any reason, you are unable to attend or no longer require this appointment, please telephone the booking team on the number at the end of this leaflet or on your appointment letter.

This will avoid undue delay and will help us to keep our waiting list as short as possible.

You are welcome to bring one adult support partner with you. Please note that children, are not allowed in the scan rooms and we are unable to offer supervision of children in the waiting room. If you are having difficulties coordinating childcare please contact the booking team in advance.

Staff are not permitted to supervise children so please ensure child care arrangements are in place to avoid your scan being rescheduled.

Please let us know well before your appointment if you would like to request staff of a specific gender. We may not be able to meet your requirements on the day. Your appointment may have to be rescheduled to facilitate this.

What is an ultrasound scan?

Ultrasound examinations (scans) are tests which use sound waves and specialist equipment to produce an image. They are particularly good at looking at some of the structures in our body without using X-rays. The progress of a pregnancy is commonly checked using ultrasound. The examination is harmless and should normally be painless. To perform the ultrasound scan we will put ultrasound gel on the skin and move a small probe over the area of interest to view structures from different angles. Sometimes the scan may be performed vaginally (internal scan).

Why do I need an ultrasound scan?

The reason for your scan should already have been clearly discussed with you, normally by the midwife or the doctor referring you. They may also have provided you with links to online resources for further information regarding screening tests offered in conjunction with scans.

Scans are routinely offered around 12 weeks of pregnancy (which includes calculating your baby's age and making some early checks on baby) and a second scan around 20 weeks (which includes more detailed checks on baby).

Scans may also be offered at earlier or later stages, depending on whether you are having certain problems or have a history of certain conditions. Sometimes these scans may be to look at the placenta.

If you have been referred for a Doppler ultrasound, this type of scan helps us assess blood flow. Most often this will look at the umbilical artery (blood flow between baby and the

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placenta) or the uterine artery (blood flow to your womb).

If you are uncertain why you are having a scan, or wish to decline, please contact the booking team or your midwife to discuss.

Preparing for your procedure

Please advise the booking team if you plan to use hospital transport, require a hoist transfer or think you may require extra support due to limited mobility.

Eating and drinking

If you are **less than 8 weeks pregnant**, having a **cervical length scan** or a **placenta scan** we may offer you a vaginal (internal) scan. If you think you may not want this type of test please arrive with a full bladder instead. The scan operator will discuss your options.

For other scans

8 to 16 weeks - Please arrive with a full bladder. About 500ml drunk an hour before the scan will usually suffice.

After 16 weeks - No preparation needed.

You may eat as normal for this test.

Medication

Please take any regular medication as usual.

Getting to us

We perform pregnancy scans at two of our three hospital sites, **please check your letter to ensure you attend the correct location.**

The Princess Alexandra Hospital
Hamstel Road, Harlow, Essex, CM20 1QX

St Margaret's Hospital
The Plain, Epping, Essex, CM16 6TN

When should I arrive?

Please arrive in the department 5 minutes before your appointment time, or a little earlier if you have any queries.

Report the reception desk where your details will be checked, you will be asked to wait in the seating area.

Please be mindful that parking on site may be difficult and allow extra time. Our Harlow site also has other pay and display parking nearby.

The day of the procedure

Please wear loose-fitting clothing over the area being scanned.

The procedure

The procedure may be performed by a sonographer (ultrasound specialist), midwife/nurse sonographer or obstetrician, they will explain more about the exam being performed for you. An assistant may also be present. Because we are a teaching hospital, there may also be some supervised trainees at your appointment. The team will make every effort to ensure your comfort and dignity.

We have both male and female staff working in the department. If you would like a chaperone for your examination, please let us know when you arrive for your appointment.

We will perform the scan in our ultrasound room which may be dimly lit so that we can see the images produced on the screen more clearly. We will ask you to lie down on a couch and move your clothing away from your tummy.

For an “on the tummy” scan, ultrasound gel will be placed on your skin and we will move an ultrasound probe slowly over the area we are scanning. Occasionally, we may need to press quite firmly. Please let us know if you feel pain at any point during the scan. If you want the scan to stop for any reason please tell the scan operator.

The scan can take between 5 to 60 minutes. Sometimes we may ask you to return to the department later in the day to allow your bladder to fill or for baby time to move into a different position. This is a common situation and does not mean there is a problem. Occasionally we may not be able to complete all the checks in a single visit and may ask you to return on another day. The reasons for this would be explained by the member of staff performing the scan, but it is often because baby is not lying in a helpful position.

The scan operator may be quite tired while the scan is being performed, so they can concentrate. We will do our best to make sure that you are seen on time, but emergencies may have to take priority on some occasions.

If you have also been asked to attend for a vaginal scan;

This is performed with an empty bladder.

You may be asked to remove some of your outer clothing and will be asked to remove your underwear. You will be given a paper sheet to cover yourself whilst lying on an examination couch.

The scan is performed using a tube-shaped probe, covered with a latex free cover and gel, which is inserted into the vagina. It will be moved at different angles to look inside the pelvis.

The probe is not inserted into the cervix or uterus and will not harm your baby, but please discuss with the operator if you are concerned.

Although this exam shouldn't usually be painful, occasionally the internal ultrasound probe can be uncomfortable when it is inserted or moved during the test. Tell the person doing the scan if the scan is difficult for you and they will help you feel more comfortable.

Depending on the type of scan we may be able to offer you a baby picture. Please discuss this with the scan operator before the end of the scan. There is a charge for pictures.

If you would like to know the sex of baby please let the scan operator know. We can usually offer this once you are more than 18 weeks pregnant. Please be aware this will not be the main focus for the scan and is not always 100% accurate. If the sonographer cannot see the sex or it is not very clear they will discuss this with you. We are unable to rebook scans to sex baby.

Since the ultrasound scans we perform are medical tests, we are unable to allow filming in the scan room. Your cooperation with this is appreciated to allow the scan operator to focus on the scan.

After the procedure

You may be directed to one of our clinics to be reviewed after your scan, or you may be able to go home. The scan operator will direct you accordingly. If you have questions about the scan please feel free to ask.

You may eat, drink, and return to your normal daily activities as soon as you wish.

Can I drive after my procedure?

Yes, there are no side effects.

Can someone stay with me in hospital?

You may have one adult friend or family member attend the scan with you. We are unable to support video links during the scans. If there are exceptional circumstances where you may need extra support please discuss with your midwife or the booking team.

How soon can I return to work?

You may return to work after your scan.

How soon will I get my results?

The scan operator will inform you of the scan findings and give you a report. You may need to be reviewed by a midwife or doctor who might give you further information.

Very occasionally scan findings can be complicated or concerning and require further input from other specialist teams. If this is the case then we will talk you through the process.

Contacting the team

If you have any further questions, please contact the;

Antenatal clinic reception team, booking / queries for routine antenatal scans and growth scans

09:00-16:00 Mon-Fri (excluding bank holidays):

01279 978748

Early Pregnancy Unit team, booking / queries for early pregnancy scans

09:00-16:00 Mon-Fri (excluding bank holidays):

01279 827107

Antenatal ultrasound reception desk for other scan queries:

09:00-16:00 Mon-Fri (excluding bank holidays):

01279 827536

Your feedback matters

If you would like to give feedback on your care, please contact our patient experience team on paht.pals@nhs.net or 01279 827211.

Please contact the communications team on paht.communications@nhs.net if you would like this leaflet in another language or format.