

Having an Ultrasound Scan

Information for Patients

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Introduction

This leaflet tells you about having an ultrasound scan. It explains how the test is done, what to expect, and what the possible risks are.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is an Ultrasound scan?

Ultrasound is a non-invasive way of looking inside your body to help diagnose medical conditions and guide treatment. An ultrasound scanner uses high-frequency sound waves and computers to produce pictures of the organs and other structures inside the body, which can be viewed on a computer monitor.

Ultrasound is particularly useful to evaluate the organs of the abdomen and pelvis, blood flow in vessels, superficial structures such as the thyroid gland and lymph glands, muscles and tendons and to identify fluid in the chest or abdomen. It is the imaging test of choice to assess the developing foetus in pregnant women.

How does it work?

The ultrasound examination is performed by a Radiologist, who is a doctor specially trained to carry out imaging examinations and to interpret the images. Some ultrasound examinations may be performed by a Sonographer, who is a health professional highly trained to carry out and report these scans.

The Radiologist or Sonographer uses a hand-held device called a transducer, which is moved across the body surface and transmits the sound waves into your body. These sound waves are reflected back to the transducer from the different structures and tissues inside the body. The returning sound waves are converted by a computer into a moving image of the internal structures of the body, and the images are displayed on a computer screen.



Are there any risks?

Ultrasound scanning does not use ionizing radiation (x-rays) and is considered a very safe test. For this reason it is often the preferred imaging test in pregnant women and children.

Tenderness in the area that has been examined is uncommon and usually resolves within a few hours of the examination.

What do I need to do before my scan?

Dietary preparation.

Guidelines about eating and drinking before your scan vary depending on the part of the body to be examined, and you should follow the instructions you are given with your appointment letter.

We may ask you not to eat, and to take clear fluids only, for 6 hours before a scan of the abdomen. If you are diabetic using insulin, please contact the Radiology department for advice.

You may need to drink fluids to fill the bladder for a scan of the kidneys, bladder or pelvis. If you would prefer to do this on arrival at the hospital, please plan to arrive approximately 30 minutes before your appointment time.

Taking tablets and medicines

You should continue to take all your normal medication.

Where do I go when I arrive at the hospital?

Please report to the reception desk in the Radiology main department (B7) or PAW Ultrasound (D3) with your appointment letter 10 minutes before your appointment time. Please click on the following link for a site map of the hospital:

http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/finding/documents/RUH_directory_map.pdf

You will be asked to sit in the waiting area until called by a member of staff. A member of the team will explain the test and answer any questions.

You should wear clothing that allows easy access to the area that is being examined. If you have to undress for the procedure, you will be shown to a private cubicle and asked to change into a clean gown. You will be asked to remove all jewellery and metal from the area to be scanned. Your clothes and valuables will be secured in a locker until after the procedure.

Can I bring a relative or friend?

You may bring a relative or friend with you to the appointment and, if you wish, they will usually be able to accompany you in the examination room.

If you need an interpreter or a chaperone, please tell us when you receive your appointment so that we can arrange this.

What happens during the procedure?

You will be taken into the Ultrasound Scanning Room and asked to sit or lie down on the examination couch. The area to be examined is exposed while the rest of the body is covered. The lighting in the room is usually dimmed in order to see the images on the computer monitor more clearly.

The Radiologist / sonographer will apply clear gel to your skin before placing the “transducer” (a smooth hand held device) onto this area using gentle pressure. The transducer is moved across the area with a sliding and rotating action and the real-time images are displayed on the computer screen. The Radiologist / sonographer records still pictures from the moving images on the screen.

During the examination you may be asked to perform some simple movements to improve the quality of the imaging. These may include holding your breath or turning into a different position, such as lying on your side or sitting up.

Occasionally it may be necessary for the Radiologist/sonographer to apply greater pressure with the transducer in order to see or assess deeper structures in the abdomen. However, if any of these manoeuvres cause you concern or discomfort, you should inform the Radiologist / sonographer immediately.

The examination takes approximately 10-20 minutes to perform.

What happens after the scan?

When the examination is finished the gel is wiped off and you will be able to dress and leave immediately. You may eat and drink as normal as soon as the examination is finished.

How do I get my results?

The Radiologist / sonographer who performed the examination will review the images and send a report to your doctor. Your GP or hospital Consultant who referred you for the test will see you to discuss the results.

Any questions?

We will do our best to make your visit as comfortable and stress free as possible. If you have any questions or suggestions for us, please contact Ultrasound appointments on 01225 825529/825637 (Main department) or 01225 824568/824380 (PAW Ultrasound).

More information

For general information about Radiology departments, visit The Royal College of Radiologists' website: <https://www.rcr.ac.uk/public-and-media/what-expect-when>

How do I make a comment about my examination?

If you have any concerns or suggestions following your examination, please contact the [Patient Advice and Liaison Service \(PALS\)](#),

Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Foundation Trust, Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG.

Email: ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net

Tel: 01225 821655 or 01225 826319