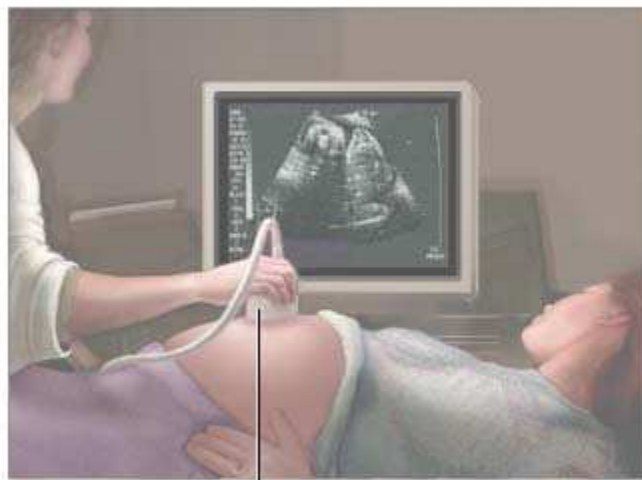




## PREGNANCY ULTRASOUND

Pregnancy ultrasound is a method of imaging the fetus and the female pelvic organs during pregnancy. The ultrasound machine sends out high-frequency sound waves, which reflect off body structures to create a picture.



Transducer



### HOW THE TEST IS PERFORMED

You will be lying down for the procedure. A clear, water-based conducting gel is applied to the skin over the area being examined to help with the transmission of the sound waves. The ultrasound transducer (a hand-held probe) is then moved over the abdomen and pelvis. This is the conventional transabdominal technique.

### HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE TEST

You will need to drink 2 to 3 glasses of liquid 1 hour before the test. You may not urinate before the examination. The full bladder allows for a better image.

### HOW IT FEELS

There may be some discomfort from the full bladder. The conducting gel may feel slightly cold and wet.

## **RISKS**

There is no documented biologic effect on patients and their fetuses with the use of current ultrasound techniques. No ionizing radiation is involved.

## **WHY THE TEST IS PERFORMED**

There is no definitive rule as to the number of scans a woman should have during her pregnancy. Some physicians will order an ultrasound when an abnormality is suspected on clinical grounds, while others advocate screening ultrasounds. You should consult your health care provider to determine the most appropriate scanning schedule for you. The number of ultrasounds may be regulated by your insurance company.

Scans may be performed in the first trimester to:

- Confirm a normal intra-uterine pregnancy
- Assess fetal age
- Exclude abnormalities such as ectopic pregnancies or threatened abortion
- Assess fetal heart activity
- Determine the presence of multiple pregnancies
- Identify abnormalities of the placenta, uterus, and other pelvic structures

Scans may also be obtained in the second and third trimesters to:

- Assess fetal age, growth and position
- Identify congenital malformations
- Exclude multiple pregnancies
- Evaluate the placenta, amniotic fluid, and remaining structures of the pelvis

Some centers are now performing a scan at around 13-14 weeks of pregnancy to measure the thickness of the "nuchal fold" (skin on the back of the fetal neck), also known as nuchal translucency, for the purpose of evaluating the risk for Down Syndrome.

The total number of scans will vary depending on whether a previous scan has detected abnormalities that require follow-up assessment.

## **WHAT A "NORMAL" ULTRASOUND MEANS**

The fetus and associated pelvic structures are normal in appearance. The status of the pregnancy is reassuring.

## **WHAT ABNORMAL RESULTS MEAN**

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

- Ectopic pregnancy
- Multiple pregnancies
- Fetal death
- Abnormalities of fetal position
- Congenital malformations
- Amniotic fluid problems, including oligohydramnios (too little) and polyhydramnios (too much)
- Placental abnormalities, including placenta previa and placental abruption
- Intrauterine growth retardation
- Tumors of pregnancy, including gestational trophoblastic disease
- Additional abnormalities of the ovaries, uterus, and remaining pelvic structures

## **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Transvaginal ultrasound scanning may be performed with the probe placed in the vagina of the patient. This technique is used most commonly in early pregnancy and often complements conventional transabdominal ultrasound techniques by providing better anatomic detail. Consult your health care provider to determine which technique is most appropriate for you.

## **THOMAS G. STOVALL, M.D.**

Dr. Stovall is a Clinical Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis, Tennessee and Partner of Women's Health Specialists, Inc.

Date Published: 2004-03-23

### **Health Information Provided by Women's Health Specialists**

7800 Wolf Trail Cove, Germantown, TN 38138, (901) 682-9222, [www.whsobgyn.com](http://www.whsobgyn.com)

This information is for educational purposes only. It does not represent comprehensive coverage of the topics addressed and is not a substitute for direct consultation with your health care provider. Always consult a health care provider regarding your specific condition. Trademarks referred to are the property of their respective owners.