



Obstetrical Ultrasound

How to prepare for your exam

Obstetrical (OB) ultrasound exams are used to check the condition of a pregnant woman and her unborn baby. Read this handout to learn how to prepare for the exam, how the exam works, how the exam is performed, what you will feel during the exam, and how to get your results.

What is obstetrical (OB) ultrasound imaging?

Ultrasound imaging is used to obtain pictures of internal organs by sending and receiving sound waves into the body. The sound waves are recorded and displayed on a screen. OB ultrasound is the special use of sound waves to check the health of a pregnant woman and her unborn baby. X-rays are not used in ultrasound.

How does the exam work?

Ultrasound sends sound waves into the body using a *transducer*, a hand-held device that sends and receives sound waves. After gel is applied to the skin, the technologist, known as a *sonographer*, will press the transducer against the skin. The sound waves echo from the fluids and tissues, forming a picture on a screen. During an OB ultrasound, this picture shows both the mother's and the baby's tissues in real-time.

How should I prepare for an OB ultrasound?

- If an ultrasound is done before 18 weeks of pregnancy, you need to have a full bladder for the exam. The full bladder allows a better view of the baby and organs. You should drink a quart of water 1 hour before the exam so your bladder will be full.
- The sonographer or radiologist may choose to do an ultrasound in early pregnancy with *transvaginal* ultrasound (a small transducer placed in the vagina), in addition to the abdominal approach. This is done with an empty bladder, so you will need to empty your bladder for this exam.
- You should wear a loose-fitting, 2-piece outfit for the exam. Only the lower abdominal area needs to be exposed during the exam.

Questions?

Call 206-598-6200

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC Ultrasound staff are also available to help at any time.

Imaging Services:
206-598-6200

How is the exam performed?

1. You will lie on an exam table, and your clothing is moved away from the lower abdominal area.
2. Warm gel is applied to the abdomen to make contact between your skin and the transducer.
3. The sonographer then presses the device against your skin and sweeps it over the abdomen to obtain pictures.
4. The radiologist may obtain more pictures after the sonographer is done.

What will I feel during the exam?

- Ultrasound of the abdomen is fast, painless, and easy.
- You will feel the sonographer apply warm gel to your abdomen and press the transducer against your skin. The transducer will be moved over your skin until all of the pictures are taken.
- You may be asked to roll on either side, or change positions.
- There is little or no discomfort with the procedure.
- The exam usually takes less than 1 hour for a single baby, and up to 2 to 3 hours for twins and triplets.

Who interprets the results of the exam and how do I get them?

The radiologist or perinatologist who specializes in ultrasound will review the pictures and send a report to your referring doctor. You will receive your results from the doctor who ordered the test. In some cases, the radiologist may discuss early findings with you when your exam is over.

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