

Radiology Department

Having an Ultrasound Scan

Information for patients



What is an Ultrasound?

An ultrasound scan is a procedure that uses high frequency sound waves to create a picture of part of the inside of the body, such as the heart. The scan is similar to the scan that women have during pregnancy to produce pictures of the baby in the womb. An ultrasound scan is carried out by a sonographer or radiologist.

A small hand-held probe is pressed carefully against the skin surface and generates sound waves. When the sound waves hit an object, such as a heart valve, they bounce back as an echo. A computer converts the reflected ultrasound echoes into an image which is displayed on a screen. The probe can be moved over the skin to view an organ from different angles.

Ultrasound images complement other forms of scans and are widely used for many different parts of the body. They can also be used to study blood flow and to detect any narrowing or blockage of blood vessels, for example the neck.

Ultrasound is also used for internal examinations; for example, of the prostate gland in men or the womb or ovaries in women. For some of these examinations, it may be necessary to place an ultrasound probe in the vagina or the rectum to look at internal structures. If you are having this type of examination the sonographer or doctor will describe the procedure to you, and will ask for your consent.

Are you required to make any special preparations in advance?

Some preparation may be required if your pelvis, kidney or bladder are to be scanned. You may be required to make sure that your bladder is full before the examination can begin. For some examinations such as gall bladder and pancreas, you may be required to fast for a specified number of hours. If so this will be explained in the accompanying appointment letter.

Can you bring a relative/friend?

Yes. However, it may not be suitable for a friend to remain in the scanning room if you need to have an internal examination.

What happens during the scan?

In the scanning room the lights will be dimmed so that the pictures can be seen more clearly. A gel will be applied to your skin over the area to be scanned - this allows the probe to slide easily and helps to produce clearer pictures.

You may be asked to take deep breaths and to hold your breath for a few moments. For a scan of the bladder, the bladder may not be full enough for the examination and you may be asked to drink more fluid.

The radiologist or sonographer will slowly move the probe over your skin while viewing the images on the screen. Records of selected images will be made so that they can be viewed later. When the scan is complete, the gel will be wiped off and you will be free to get dressed.

Will it be uncomfortable?

An ultrasound is not uncomfortable and apart from the probe on your skin you will not feel anything. There may be some slight discomfort if a full bladder is required.

How long will it take?

The scan itself takes about 20 minutes. Sometimes, if we have to see emergency patients, your scan may be delayed.

Are there any risks?

No, there are no known risks and it is considered to be very safe.

Can you eat or drink afterwards?

Yes.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us on the telephone number at the top of your appointment letter.

Other sources of information

Further information is available on the NHS Conditions website:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ultrasound-scan/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

For general information about radiology departments, visit The Royal College of Radiologist website: www.goingfora.com

For health advice or information you can call NHS Direct on 0845 45647 or visit the website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk**

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