

Imaging department

# Having a gynaecological pelvic and internal (transvaginal) ultrasound scan

Information for patients, relatives and carers

## Introduction

This leaflet tells you more about having a gynaecological pelvic and internal (transvaginal) ultrasound scan, how to prepare and what happens during your scan. Please feel free to ask our team if you have any questions about the information below.

## What is an ultrasound scan?

Sound travels in waves. Ultrasound is sound which travels at a higher frequency than we can hear.

Ultrasound scans (examinations) are done by building up pictures from the return of sound waves as they bounce back from any resistance they meet. The sound waves can be directed to and bounced back from the surfaces of various structures within the body to form pictures on an ultrasound monitor.

The ultrasound waves are sent to and from the body by moving a probe (transducer) over the surface of the skin of the area to be examined. Pictures (images) are taken. These are interpreted by doctors and sonographers, who are technicians who specialise in ultrasound.

Ultrasound scans can be used to diagnose a variety of conditions. They are commonly used to scan babies during pregnancy.

**Pelvic ultrasound scans** can monitor changes in the womb (uterus) and the ovaries. There are two ways of performing a pelvic scan.

- for a **transabdominal pelvic scan**, you will be asked to drink water to fill your bladder. The ultrasound probe is placed on the skin in the lower part of your tummy.
- for an **internal (transvaginal) scan**, a special probe is placed into the vagina. This method can get much clearer and more detailed pictures

---

## Why do I need this scan?

Your doctor has asked for this scan to look for abnormalities of your womb or ovaries that might be causing your symptoms.

## What do I need to do before my appointment?

**It is very important you follow these preparation instructions.**

**You need to have a full bladder for the first part of the scan.**

Please drink 1 litre (1000ml or almost 2 pints) of water 1 hour before your appointment time.

**Do not pee** (empty your bladder) again before your appointment.

If you are distressed by being too full, you may release a small amount of pee, but please stay as full as possible.

If an internal scan is needed, you will be able to have a pee and empty your bladder completely before this is done.

### Internal scan

Please tell the person doing the scan if you have any concerns or questions. They will be able to reassure you. You can choose to have this scan, or not to have this scan.

The internal scan can be done while you are having your period.

It will not be done if:

- you are not sexually active
- have never had an internal examination
- you do not want the scan

## Will it hurt?

No. It should not hurt. However, you may experience slight discomfort. If it hurts or gets painful, please let the operator know. You can ask for the examination to stop at any time.

## What are the risks and benefits of this test?

An ultrasound scan is a relatively quick procedure which gives your doctors detailed information about the area being examined. As ultrasound is made up of sound waves, there are no risks or side effects associated with this test, even if you have a pacemaker or other electronic implant.

---

## Are there any alternatives to this test?

Your doctor will only ask for an ultrasound scan if they consider it is the best way to find out more information about your condition. Other tests such as CT or MRI scans can also give information but are not normally done before an ultrasound scan.

## What happens on the day of my appointment?

If you are already an inpatient in hospital, you will be brought from the ward to the imaging department.

If you are having the scan as an outpatient, we will ask you to report to reception in the imaging department. Your appointment letter will tell you which hospital to attend.

**Photography or electronic recording of any kind is not allowed in the scanning room.**

1. **Drink 1 litre of water 1 hour before your appointment. Do not have a pee.**
2. Your scan will be done either by a doctor specialising in imaging (a radiologist) or a sonographer, who is a technician specialised in ultrasound imaging.
3. You may be asked to undress and change into a hospital gown. There is no need to remove jewellery or hearing aids.
4. You will be asked to confirm your identity and to line down on an examination couch.
5. The lights will be dimmed so the pictures on the ultrasound screen can be seen more clearly.
6. You may be asked some questions about your health before the scan begins. If you can get pregnant, expect to be asked for the date of the 1st day of your last period. Please work this out before your appointment if you can.
7. A water-soluble gel is then applied to your tummy (lower abdomen). The jelly allows the probe to slide over the skin easily and helps to produce clearer pictures of the womb and ovaries.
8. You will be able to have a pee and empty your bladder once the external scan has been done.
9. If an internal (transvaginal) scan is needed, the person doing the test will ask for your consent before proceeding.
  - the transvaginal ultrasound probe is slightly thicker than your thumb
  - it will be inserted about 4cms (1.5 inches) into your vagina
  - it will be covered with a disposable rubber (latex) sheath to make sure it is hygienic. Please tell us if you have a latex allergy, so we can use an alternative probe cover if necessary

- 
10. Once in place, the probe is moved around and rotated until the best pictures are obtained.
  11. The scan normally takes five to ten minutes to complete.
  12. The gel will be wiped off your skin and you will be able to get dressed.

## Would you like a chaperone?

Please let us know if you would like a chaperone with you in the scanning room. We will be very happy to arrange this for you.

A chaperone is an impartial observer who can be there during an intimate examination. Their role is to protect patients and staff.

## What happens next?

If your scan was done as an outpatient appointment or if you have been referred by your GP, you will be allowed to go home. You will get the results of the scan when you next see the hospital doctor or your GP.

If your scan was done as an inpatient, you will be taken back to the ward.

The person doing the scan is not always able to give the results immediately, as they need to look at the pictures carefully after the scan. A full report will then be written, and your doctor will be informed of the results as soon as possible.

## When will I get the results?

The person doing the scan is not always able to give you the results immediately because they need to look at the pictures carefully after the scan.

If your GP requested the examination, you should arrange to see them to get the results about two weeks after your appointment.

If your hospital doctor requested the examination, you should receive the results on the ward or at your next outpatient clinic appointment.

## How do I get to the hospital?

Please visit the Trust's website for more information about travelling to our hospitals:  
[www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations)

## What if I cannot keep my appointment?

Please contact us as soon as possible. We can then offer this date to another patient and agree a new appointment date and time with you. You will find the appropriate telephone number on your appointment letter.

---

## Contact details

Please do not hesitate to contact our imaging departments if you have any queries or concerns:

Charing Cross Hospital      020 3311 1863

Hammersmith Hospital      020 3313 3389

St Mary's Hospital      020 3312 6418

Willesden Community  
Diagnostic Centre      020 3704 6572

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service, and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net). The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department: Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net) or telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:  
[imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

Imaging department  
Published: June 2025  
Review date: June 2028  
Reference no: 5291  
© Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust