

Imaging department

Having an ultrasound scan

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet tells you more about having an 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 examinations (scans) 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.

What do I need to do before my appointment?

It is important you follow all the preparation instructions.

We will tell you what you need to do to prepare. We might ask you:

- not to have anything to eat or drink for 6 hours before your scan
- or to have a full bladder

Otherwise, you can eat and drink as normal.

Please take all your medications as usual, unless we advise you otherwise.

If you are diabetic:

- **and are having your ultrasound scan done as an outpatient**, please telephone the imaging department at the hospital where you are due to have the scan. Let them know you are diabetic. (See Contact details on page 4 of this information sheet)

If you are diabetic:

- **and are having your ultrasound scan done as an inpatient**, please let your ward nurse know as soon as you get an appointment date. You can follow your normal diet and medication, unless told otherwise. Your appointment letter or ward nurse will confirm this

Are there any special arrangements for children having scans?

Most children will be scanned at St Mary's Hospital, where there is a children's (paediatric) department. Only a few scans for children are done at Hammersmith Hospital and none at Charing Cross Hospital.

One parent or carer may normally come into the scanning room with the child.

Generally, children do not mind having ultrasound scans. Older children often find it interesting to watch the pictures on the screen. Ticklish children may find it difficult to keep still – we will do our best not to move the sensor too quickly!

If your child is very young, it may be helpful to bring a bottle feed to distract them. You may also prefer to hold your child on your lap during the scan.

Will it hurt?

No, it should not hurt. You should only feel the gentle pressure of the sensor pressing over the skin. If you do have any discomfort (due to the sensor pressing on a tender area, for example), please let the operator know.

What are the benefits and risks of this test?

An ultrasound scan is a relatively quick procedure. It 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 have asked for an ultrasound scan because they feel this is best way to find out more information about your condition.

Other tests such as CT or MRI scans can also give information, but not in the same detail as this examination.

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 and electronic recording of any kind is not allowed in the scanning room.

1. 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.
2. You may be asked to undress and change into a hospital gown. There is no need to remove jewellery or hearing aids.
3. You will be asked to confirm your identity and to lie down on an examination couch.
4. The lights will be dimmed so the pictures on the ultrasound screen can be seen more clearly.
5. You may be asked some questions about your health before the scan begins.
6. A water-soluble gel is then applied to your skin. The gel allows the probe to slide over the skin easily and helps to produce clearer pictures.
7. Occasionally, a doctor may want to improve the picture quality by using a special dye (known as contrast medium). This can improve diagnosis. If a doctor feels it is necessary to use this dye, they will discuss it with you.
8. A small volume of contrast medium will be injected through a small, plastic tube (cannula) inserted into a vein in your arm. The dye is safe and usually has no side-effects, but you may experience slight discomfort in the arm where the dye is injected. If this happens, there is nothing to worry about as it will generally disappear shortly after the scan.
9. The scan normally takes between 15 and 30 minutes to complete, depending upon which parts of the body are to be examined.
10. Please feel free to ask questions during the test.
11. 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 can be there to observe the examination. They will know if it is being done properly. They will be fair to 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. They need to look at the pictures carefully after the scan. A full report will then be written, and your doctor will be told 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.

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. 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

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

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

Imaging department
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