

Essex Ultrasound - Preparation Sheet

Radiologists are doctors specially trained to interpret the results and to carry out some of the more complex examinations. They are supported by radiographers who are highly trained to carry out many of the X-ray and other imaging procedures.

Sonographers are radiographers who have trained further to specialise in the technique of ultrasound. They carry out a great number of these examinations in the NHS and provide a descriptive report of their findings to your doctor.

What is an Ultrasound Scan?

An ultrasound scan builds up a picture of part of the inside of the body using sound waves of a frequency above the audible range of the human ear. A small hand-held sensor, which is pressed carefully against the skin surface, both generates sound waves and detects any echoes reflected back off the surfaces and tissue boundaries of internal organs. The sensor can be moved over the skin to view the organ from different angles, the pictures being displayed on a TV monitor screen and recorded for subsequent study.

Ultrasound images compliment 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 detect any narrowing or blockage of the blood vessels, for example in the neck.

Ultrasound is also used for intimate 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 rectum to look at internal structures. If you are having an intimate examination the radiologist/sonographer will describe the procedure to you, and your verbal consent will be sought. In these cases, it is normal for a third person (a "chaperone") to be present and, if one is not, you may request this if you wish.

Are there any risks?

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

Information for patients coming for Abdominal ultrasound examination

The examination is to look at your liver, gallbladder or pancreas then you should not eat for at least 6-8 hours prior to the test and drink only clear fluids preferably still water. If we are looking at the kidneys and bladder it is best to drink at least 6-8 glasses of water about 1-2 hours before the test and try not to go to the toilet during this time. For both upper and lower abdomen, you will be requested to fast for 6-8 hours and attend with a full bladder.

Information for Female patients coming fro a pelvic ultrasound examination

The best way to perform this investigation is by transvaginal scan: this involves pacing a small ultrasound probe into the vagina (similar to inserting a tampon) and allows a detailed assessment of the pelvic organs. It is completely safe and means to all the anatomy is seen more clearly. The examination room will be slightly darkened to optimize the viewing conditions, you will be asked to lie on a couch and covered with a sheet. If you are having a transvaginal scan it is important to tell us if you have a latex allergy as the cover we use for the probe is normally made of latex, however we do have some latex free covers should this be required. There are no special preparation instructions, and the examination can be performed at any time of the cycle. You should not have this test if you have never had an internal examination or if you are still a virgin. If you have any questions please ask the Sonographer prior to the examination. It is best if your bladder is empty when the test is performed. If you have never had an internal examination it will be necessary to have an abdominal scan, which requires a full bladder, you will need to drink at least two litres of water prior to your scan.

Information for patients coming in for all other scans

You may not need any special preparation and will be informed at the time of the booking the appointment.

Can I bring a relative/friend?

Yes , you may be accompanied.

When you arrive

Please go to the reception desk, as advised in the accompanying appointment letter, after which you will be shown where to wait collected by a member of staff.

Upon collection

you will be advised if you have to remove any clothes on entering the examination room, in which case you will be shown a private area where you may take off your outer garments and a vanity sheet will be provided.

Who will you see?

You will be cared for by a small team and seen by a radiologist or a sonographer depending upon the type of investigation you are having. During the scan the radiologist/sonographer will look at the images on the TV screen and, if necessary, look at the record of the images later, before writing a report.

What happens during the scan?

You will be asked some questions about your health and in particular your current symptoms . You will be invited to lie down on a couch, and the lights in the room may be dimmed so that the pictures on the TV screen can be seen more clearly. A gel will be applied to your skin over the area to be scanned, for example the abdomen. The gel allows the sensor to slide easily over the skin and helps to produce clearer pictures.

Sometimes you will be on your back or you may be asked to turn on your side, lie flat on your stomach or even to stand during the examination. There is usually help for those who find this difficult. 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 occasionally not be full enough for the examination and you may be asked to drink more fluid. If your bladder is uncomfortably full you should tell the sonographer, so that at this part of the examination can be completed as soon as possible. You could then leave the examination room to empty your bladder before returning for any further examination.

The radiographer/sonographer sits or stands besides you, slowly moving the sensor over your skin while viewing the images over the screen. Records of selected images will be made so that they can be viewed later. Upon completion, the gel will be wiped off and you will be free to get dressed.

The details of the intimate examinations will be explained at the time and your consent will be sought. If you don't already have an appointment to see your referring doctor, you should confirm with the radiographer/sonographer how you should obtain one.

Will it be uncomfortable?

Ultrasound itself does not produce discomfort and apart from the sensor on your skin you will now feel anything. If a full bladder is required, though, there may be some associated discomfort.

Ultrasound is often carried out to try and find out the reason why a patient has severe abdominal or pelvic pain. In these circumstances, some pressure may be applied to the skin surface over an inflamed organ, for example, the gallbladder, to check what's causing the pain. This may increase the amount of pain coming from that organ temporarily, but would be no worse than, for example, being examined by a doctor on a ward.

How long will it take?

The process of carrying out a scan usually takes about 10-15 minutes. Unless you are delayed, for example by emergency patients, your total time in the Department is likely to be about 30-40 minutes.

Are there any side-effects?

No. You can drive home afterwards, and return to work as necessary.

Can you eat and drink afterwards?

Yes, you can do so normally.

When will you get the results?

After the scan, the images will be examined further by the radiologist/sonographer, who will prepare a report on his/her findings. This may take some time to reach your referring doctor, but is normally less than 10 days. You could ask the radiologist or sonographer how long it might take before results are through.

Why and how information will be shared, and with who?

Once your scan has been completed, the results will be shared with the referring Doctor. Depending on the finding of your scan, your Doctor may decide to refer you to a specialist at the Hospital. It may be necessary for a copy of your scan and the report to be sent to the Hospital as the staff there will need to see these results.

If you have a query?

If you have a query about having the ultrasound scan, please ring the Admin Team at Essex Ultrasound Medical Services between 9am and 5pm, 01268 686 107

Legal Notice

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. It is not definitive, and the RCR cannot accept any legal liability arising from its use. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that it is always subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on the procedure or any concerns you may have with your doctor. This leaflet has been prepared by the Clinical Radiology Patient's Liaison Group CRPLG of the Royal College of Radiologists.