

18 to 22-week pregnancy ultrasound

What is an 18 to 22-week pregnancy ultrasound?

An 18 to 22-week pregnancy ultrasound is part of the routine care during pregnancy. The ultrasound is carried out at this stage in the pregnancy because your baby is big enough for its anatomy and development to be assessed. It provides information such as:

- The number of babies
- The age of the baby
- Confirmation of your delivery due date
- The position of the placenta
- The amount of fluid around the baby
- The appearance of the cervix (the neck of the uterus and part of the birth canal).

Ultrasound uses soundwaves to see and pictures on an ultrasound screen in 'real time'. This makes it ideal for imaging the moving foetus.

Why would my doctor refer me to have this procedure?

You are referred for ultrasound scan as part of a routine check-up at this stage of your pregnancy. This is used to see that your baby is growing normally, including limbs, heart, brain and internal organs. It can also help detect some abnormalities earlier than would be otherwise possible.

Can I have my scan earlier or later than 18 to 22-weeks?

It is recommended to have the scan from 18-21 weeks onwards and preferably before 21 weeks, as this is the best time to see all the structures clearly.

How do I prepare for an 18 to 22-week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

There is very little preparation needed. You should have some fluid in the bladder, but not be uncomfortably full.

It is a good idea to wear comfortable clothing that gives easy access to your entire abdominal area.

It is preferable, that young children are not present during the ultrasound examination, as they can become restless, which can distract the Sonographer and some important information might be missed.

It is strongly recommended that if you have young children, you arrange for childcare beforehand and do not bring children to your scan appointment if there is no one to care for them in the waiting room.



What happens during an 18 to 22-week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

You are asked to lie on an examination couch. The abdomen is exposed, and a clear gel is applied to the skin. This can easily be washed off after the examination.

The screening ultrasound is carried out in real time, so the images you see on the screen show what is happening inside your uterus at that moment, like watching a movie.

The experience of seeing your unborn baby is exciting and positive, and the sonographer carrying out the examination will normally point out easily recognised parts of the body. You might not recognise or understand some of the images you see on the ultrasound screen, but it is all part of this important and thorough screening.

You may wish to know the sex of your baby, as it can usually be seen at this time. If you would like to know, ask the sonographer to tell you. Occasionally, the sonographer will not be able to tell, usually because of the position of the baby.

If it is not possible to tell the sex, you will not receive another screening ultrasound for that purpose. You should be aware that assessment of the sex is not 100% accurate. If you do not want to know the sex of your baby, tell the sonographer before they start the scan.

The ultrasound is carried out for medical reasons to fully check and assess the development of your baby from head to toe.

Several measurements of your baby will be taken (head size, abdomen and bones) to assess the exact size and age of the baby. The position of the placenta will be checked to make sure it is away from the cervix so that it does not block the birth canal during labour.

Occasionally, the baby is in such a position that an area cannot be seen, and the Sonographer may ask you to return on another day to complete the scan. This should not alarm you and often happens.

Ultrasound

Patient Information



The person carrying out the screening ultrasound will be concentrating very closely on the images as they come onto the screen and might be quiet or not talking. Do not be concerned, as they are concentrating on this complex examination.

Pregnancy ultrasound is complex, there are many structures that need to be checked and measured. A normal baby will move quite a bit during the scan, and it might take a few minutes to get exactly the right image of a hand, foot, the brain, or various parts of the chest or abdomen.

How long does an 18 to 22-week screening pregnancy ultrasound take?

The screening pregnancy ultrasound usually takes 45 minutes.

What are the risks of an 18 to 22-week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

There are no known risks of having an abdominal ultrasound, to the baby or mother. There is no radiation involved.

The quality of the examination can be reduced in some patients who are obese. Image quality is often not as clear because the baby is further away from the ultrasound transducer. This can make the examination more difficult.

What are the benefits of an 18 to 22-week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

The 18 to 22-week pregnancy ultrasound is a screening test to examine your babies' development. A baby has normal development in 98-99% of pregnancies. A small number of scans (1-2%) will identify a major structural abnormality.

What happens if something abnormal is found on the 18 to 22-week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

Not all abnormalities can be seen on ultrasound. Ultrasound accuracy is approximately 60% for detecting abnormalities. Approximately 50% of Down syndrome cases are detected by ultrasound. Occasionally, signs of other rare chromosomal abnormalities can be detected. Sometimes uncommon structural abnormalities can be seen in an otherwise normal foetus.

A normal ultrasound result for a baby does not necessarily mean normal development will continue throughout the rest of pregnancy and in infancy.

The significance of any abnormality will be explained to you by a doctor, and it might be necessary to have further tests such as amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling to confirm the ultrasound results.

If abnormalities are detected, the radiologist will talk with your doctor about the possible reasons for the abnormalities. This will help to guide the discussion

between you and your doctor about any further investigation or treatment that may be needed.

Who does the 18 to 22-week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

The examination is carried out by a sonographer, who is specially trained and accredited to carry out the scan. Sonographers can be male or female. If you are not comfortable with a male, you should let the reception staff know this at the time of making your appointment. In these cases where the patient is young or has religious or ethnic concerns, a female chaperone can be requested.

The sonographer might leave the room to show the images to the radiologist (specialist doctor) who provides a report to your GP or obstetrician. The radiologist might also carry out further scanning.

How do I get my results?

Your doctor will receive a written report on your scan as soon as is practicable.

It is very important that you discuss the results with the doctor who referred you so that they can explain what the results mean for you.

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