

Information for patients having an ultrasound



The Royal College of Radiologists

The leaflet tells you about having an ultrasound. It explains what is involved and what the possible risks are. It is not meant to replace informed discussion between you and your doctor, but can act as a starting point for such a discussion.

The radiology department

The radiology department may also be called the x-ray or imaging department. It is the facility in the hospital where radiological examinations of patients are carried out, using a range of x-ray equipment, such as a CT (computed tomography) scanner, an ultrasound machine and a MRI scanner.

The radiologists are doctors specially trained to interpret the images and carry out more complex examinations. They are supported by radiographers who are highly trained to carry out x-rays and other imaging procedures.

What is an ultrasound scan?

An ultrasound scan is 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 screen and recorded for subsequent study.

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, 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 the rectum to look at internal structures. If you are having an intimate examination the radiologist will describe the procedure to you, and your consent will be sought.

Who will be doing the ultrasound?

Sonographers are radiologists who have trained further to specialise in the technique of ultrasound. They carry out a great number of these

examinations and may provide a descriptive report of their findings to your doctor

Where will the procedure take place?

Generally in the x-ray department.

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 ensure that your bladder is full before the examination can begin. For some examinations such as of the 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. You should tell the radiology department in advance if you have had a similar ultrasound recently.

Can you bring a relative/friend?

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

When you arrive

Please report to the reception desk in the x-ray department.

Upon collection

The sonographer will explain the procedure for your examination and if you have to undress for the procedure may show you to a private cubicle where you will undress.

Who will you see?

You will be seen by a radiologist or a sonographer depending upon the type of investigation you are having.

What happens during the scan?

You will be taken into a room where you will be asked to lie down on a couch, the room may be dimmed so that the pictures on the 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.

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.

The radiologist/sonographer will slowly move the sensor over your skin while viewing the images on 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.

Will it be uncomfortable?

Ultrasound itself does not produce discomfort and apart from the sensor on your skin you will not feel anything. If a full bladder is required, though, there may be some associated discomfort. In these circumstances, some pressure may be applied to the skin surface over an inflamed organ, for example, the gallbladder, to check what is causing the pain. This may increase the amount of pain coming from that organ temporarily.

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 risks?

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

Can you eat and drink afterwards?

Yes.

When will you get the results?

The scan will be examined after your visit and a written report on the findings sent to your referring doctor which is normally available in 14 days.

Other sources of information

Websites

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

For information about the effects of x-rays read the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) publication: 'x-rays how safe are they?' on the website: http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1194947388410

NHS Direct

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

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This leaflet has been prepared by the Clinical Radiology Patients' Liaison Group (CRPLG) of The Royal College of Radiologists.

Board of the Faculty of Clinical Radiology

The Royal College of Radiologists, March 2008

Notes for medical staff

This patient information leaflet may be downloaded and, if necessary adapted, for medical use and is also a direct source of information for patients accessing this website. It has been produced by the Clinical Radiology Patients' Liaison Group of The Royal College of Radiologists. If being used for a hospital leaflet, it is recognised that certain other information would need to be included for the patient as described below.

The appointment arrangements

- **Details of investigation**
- **Date, time and location**
- **What the patient should do if they are unable to attend**
- **Contact telephone number(s)**

Special instructions

- **Preparations required before attending**
- **Advice on dealing with personal valuables**

How to find the site

- **Hospital, transport, parking**
- **Department, directions, map**

Special needs

- **Information for those with a disability (parking, nearest drop-off point, transport within hospital)**
- **Special language needs**
- **Help for deaf/hard of hearing, blind/partially sighted**