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ULTRASOUND SCAN



ADVICE SHEET: ULTRASOUND SCAN

What is it?

Ultrasound (also known as a sonogram) is a method regularly used to look at images of the inside of the body. It uses a sound that you can't hear. When an ultrasound probe is placed on the body, these sound waves bounce back and are picked up by a special machine. This is because the waves reach different parts of the body, which all have different densities, and those waves echo back different strengths.

Ultrasound can be used on many parts of the body to identify conditions or monitor things. For example, it can be used during pregnancy to check a baby is growing properly, or to look at organs, like the bladder, kidneys or ovaries.

It works by using a device that is run over the skin (using a special lubricating gel) above the area or organ that is being looked at. Sound waves are sent through the skin and muscles. The device is also connected to a computer, and the sound waves bounce back and are converted to an image that can be interpreted by the sonographer. This is called an external scan. Other scans include internal and endoscopic. An internal scan allows the practitioner to study more closely organs, such as the womb. The device can be inserted into the vagina or rectum. An endoscopic scan is used to look at organs such as the stomach. A flexible tube with a light attached is inserted into the mouth.

How will you be treated?

You may need to take some steps to prepare yourself before an ultrasound, depending on which area of the body is going to be examined. For example, you may need to have a full bladder if your pelvic area is going to be looked at, or if you are going to have your unborn baby scanned. Alternatively, you may need to avoid eating before a scan of your bowels.

If you are having an external scan, you will need to expose the area that will be scanned when you are ready. The sonographer will apply a little gel to the area. This makes the probe move easily over your body. They will look at the computer to interpret any results.

What can you do to help yourself?

If you are going to have an ultrasound, always make sure you follow any instructions beforehand. This is so you are ready for your scan. Try to stay relaxed during the procedure. An ultrasound scan does not hurt and takes between 15 and 45 minutes, so is completed pretty quickly. The sonographer will concentrate on the images so don't worry if they don't say anything. Always ask questions if you are concerned.

References

1. Patient.co.uk, <http://www.patient.co.uk/health/ultrasound-scan> [accessed 20 November 2012].
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3. NHS Choices, <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Ultrasound-scan/Pages/Introduction.aspx> [accessed 21 November 2012].



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