

Pelvic Ultrasound Scan

Patient Information Series – What you should know, what you should ask.

What is a pelvic ultrasound scan?

A pelvic ultrasound scan is an easy way to look inside your abdomen. It works through sound waves (a bit like sonar or radar). An ultrasound probe connected to an ultrasound machine is placed on the area being examined. Examination can be internal (transvaginal) or external or both. If you are sexually active an internal scan is preferred but an explanation will be given prior to procedure. The probe emits sound waves which travel through your body and bounce back off any structure they come in contact with. The returning sound waves (or echoes) are read by the machine and translated into a picture on the screen. The waves show the size of the object, how far away it is and how dense it is (i.e. is it fluid, such as blood, or is it solid, such as bones).

Why do I need a pelvic ultrasound scan?

In many cases an ultrasound scan is done to just rule out a problem and offer reassurance. Sometimes an examination may suggest there is a problem. If this is the case, having an ultrasound scan can tell us more about what is wrong and will help us decide how to plan treatment.

Do I have to have a pelvic ultrasound scan?

No. This is entirely 'your choice'. As outlined above ultrasound is often used to confirm the findings of a physical examination or to rule out a variety of problems. Sometimes, the physical examination is enough on its own and no further tests are required.

What if I am pregnant?

This is also fine. Ultrasound is used on a daily basis to examine pregnant women and is entirely safe in this respect when done by a professionally trained specialist.

How accurate is a pelvic ultrasound scan?

Ultrasound is highly accurate and can provide detailed information in the majority of cases. Ultrasound scans have limitations and sometimes further tests may be necessary to accurately diagnose a condition.

When should I have the scan?

Most pelvic ultrasound scans can be undertaken at any stage of your menstrual cycle, including during your period if you are happy for this to be done. Some scans are best performed during specific stages in your cycle and you will be told if this is the case. Scans can be conducted at any time for women with irregular cycles and for those who do not have periods.

Pelvic Ultrasound Scan

Patient Information Series – What you should know, what you should ask.

How long will it take?

A typical pelvic ultrasound scan takes somewhere between 10 and 15 minutes but could be longer or shorter. The actual time needed will depend on why you are having the scan and what is seen.

What questions should I ask?

- If a problem is diagnosed or suspected, how sure are you that there is truly a problem?
- Do I need further tests or another ultrasound scan to confirm the diagnosis?
- What is the diagnosis or suspicion?
- If there is nothing apparent, how sure are you that there is nothing?

Disclaimer:

The content of [this leaflet/ our website] is provided for general information only. It is not intended to amount to medical advice on which you should rely. You must obtain professional or specialised individual medical advice relating to your individual position before taking, or refraining from, any action on the basis of the content on [this leaflet/ our website]. Although we make reasonable efforts to update the information on [our leaflets/ website], we make no representations, warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, that the content on [our leaflet/ website] is accurate, complete or up to date.

Last updated September 2019