

Having a breast ultrasound scan

The aim of this information sheet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about having an ultrasound scan of the breast. It explains the benefits and risks of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a radiographer in the Breast Imaging Unit or with one of the breast care nurses. Contact numbers are included at the bottom of this sheet.

What is an ultrasound scan of the breast?

An ultrasound scan uses high frequency sound waves to produce pictures of the inside of the breast. A small hand held probe is pressed against the skin surface. It generates sound waves and also detects sound echoes, both of which are used to display images of breast tissue on a monitor.

What are the benefits – why should I have this procedure?

Ultrasound scans are able to detect changes within your breast, some of which you may be aware of (such as a breast lump). An ultrasound scan may also detect changes that cannot be felt during a physical examination. This includes lesions located deep within your breast which may require further investigation.

Ultrasound scans are performed by radiologists and sonographers that are specially trained to perform and interpret scans.

What are the risks?

There are no known risks. Ultrasound does not involve using x-rays and is considered to be very safe.

Are there any alternatives?

There are no alternative methods of imaging the breast in a similar way to a breast ultrasound. An alternative you may be offered is a clinical examination and a biopsy by a breast clinician.

How can I prepare for an ultrasound scan?

There are no special preparations beforehand for this procedure. You can eat and drink normally before and after.

On the day of your appointment, we advise that you wear clothes that can be easily removed, as you will be asked to undress from the waist upwards.

Please do not wear deodorant, powder, lotion or perfume on your breasts and under arm areas as ultrasound gel will be applied to your breast and under arm area during the examination. Some deodorants, lotions, powders and perfumes can affect the accuracy of breast examinations.

Try to bring a friend or relative to accompany you home. This may also be useful if you do not understand English very well or if you have any special needs. Although your friend or relative may not be allowed into the examination room, they can be a valuable source of support for you on the day. If you require an interpreter to attend your appointment, please contact the Language Support Service on 020 7188 8815.

You should also note that we are unable to offer childcare facilities. If you need to bring your children with you, please bring along an adult who can supervise them when your examination is being carried out.

Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves. If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you.

What happens during the procedure?

The procedure should last no longer than 15 minutes, however please allow extra time in case of delays on the day or your appointment.

The radiologist or sonographer will first discuss your breast problems with you.

You will be asked to remove all of your clothes from the waist up and to lie on the examination couch. Here, your breast may be examined to check the position of any lumps, and a water-based clear gel will be applied to the skin of your breast. This allows the ultrasound probe to slide easily over the skin and helps to produce clear pictures. The radiologist or sonographer will slowly move the probe over the skin when viewing the images produced on the monitor. The lights in the room will be dimmed so that the pictures on the screen can be seen more clearly, and records of selected images will be made so that they can be viewed later.

Once the examination is over the gel will be wiped off and you will be free to get dressed.

Will I feel any pain?

If you suffer from general breast tenderness it is possible you may feel a mild degree of discomfort as the probe passes over the breast, but for the majority of women ultrasound is a painless examination.

What happens after the procedure?

The ultrasound images will be reviewed by the radiologist or a sonographer, and a report will be issued to the clinician that referred you.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You can go back to normal activity straight away, including work and sports.

What should I do if I have a problem?

Following an ultrasound scan you should not have any adverse after-effects to cause concern. However, we have included contact numbers at the bottom of this sheet if you feel you need any advice.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

If you have come for your ultrasound scan via an appointment at the Breast Unit One Stop Clinic, you may be asked to return to the Breast Unit once all your tests have been completed. Here, the breast consultant will tell you when you should expect to receive your results. Otherwise you will receive your results in the post and a copy will be sent to your GP – this usually takes about two weeks.

If you have come for an outpatient appointment, you will receive the results from your consultant at your next appointment. Please make sure that an appointment is arranged for you to come in and discuss the results.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns before your appointment, please contact one of the mammographers in the Breast Imaging Unit on 020 7188 5574 or one of the breast care nurses on 020 7188 0869 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

If you have any questions or problems after your appointment, please contact the Breast Clinic on 020 7188 1483 or the mammogram secretary on 020 7188 4246 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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