Having an abdominal ultrasound scan

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having an abdominal ultrasound scan. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what to expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of the staff in the Radiology Department.

What is an abdominal ultrasound scan?
Ultrasound uses high frequency sound waves to create an image of an area of the body. This is a widely used diagnostic test to examine the abdominal organs (liver, kidneys, pancreas, gallbladder, spleen and aorta) and soft tissues of the body. The ultrasound is carried out by a sonographer or radiologist, both are trained professionals in this type of scan.

Why should I have an abdominal ultrasound scan?
Your doctor has referred you to have an abdominal ultrasound scan to help find the cause of your problem and your doctor feels this is the best test for you. An ultrasound can also be used to monitor an existing condition.

How should I prepare?
- If you have type 1 diabetes you should have an early morning appointment. If your appointment is for a later time, please contact the Radiology Ultrasound Bookings Department to change the time of your scan.
- You will need to fast for six hours prior to your appointment.
- You can drink clear fluids. Do not have any drinks containing milk, any fizzy drinks or alcohol.
- You should continue to take your medication prescribed by your doctor.
- You should wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing for your scan.
- If you require a hoist, transport or a translator, please contact the Radiology Department.

What are the risks?
An abdominal ultrasound scan is a very safe procedure with no side effects.

Are there any alternatives?
Depending on your signs and symptoms, there may be an alternative test available such as a CT scan or an MRI scan. If there is a more suitable examination the department will contact your doctor. It may be necessary to have another type of diagnostic scan as well as your abdominal ultrasound scan to help with the diagnosis of your problem.

Giving my consent (permission)
The sonographer/radiologist will ask you if you are happy for the scan to go ahead. This is called verbal consent and may only involve the sonographer/radiologist checking that you are booked for the correct scan.
If you do not wish to have the scan or are undecided, please tell the staff member. It is your decision and you can change your mind at any time. Please bear in mind that not having the scan may delay your diagnosis as the doctors may not have all of the information that they need. Remember that you can ask the sonographer/radiologist any questions you have at any time before, during or after your scan. If you would like to read our consent policy, please tell a member of staff.

**What happens during the abdominal ultrasound scan?**
You will be asked to lie down on the ultrasound couch and to remove any clothing from your torso area. Some paper tissue will be used to cover your clothing to protect it from the gel.

Ultrasound gel is placed onto the area being examined and a small handheld probe is placed over this gel, which helps to manoeuvre the probe across the torso. You may be asked to breathe in and hold your breath a number of times. You may also be required to turn onto your side so that we can get views from multiple angles. Once the scan is completed, you will be given tissue to wipe away the gel and you can put your clothes back on.

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.

**Will I feel any pain?**
Unless you are already in pain due to your symptoms, an abdominal ultrasound scan will normally be pain free.

**How long will the scan take?**
The scan itself will normally take between 10 and 20 minutes. While we try to ensure that appointment times are kept, sometimes emergencies may need to take priority. We will inform you of any delays. Please be patient, but feel free to ask staff if you think you have been overlooked. You should allow one hour in total for your appointment.

**When will I get my results?**
Your scan will be reviewed and most often reported on the same day. The results will be sent back to your doctor who will discuss the report with you. If your referring doctor is your GP then you should make an appointment for two weeks after your scan to discuss the results. If your referring doctor is a consultant at Guy’s and St Thomas’ then you should have an outpatient appointment arranged. If not, please contact them to arrange a time to talk about the results and any treatment you may need.

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**Contact us**
If you have any questions or concerns about coming for your ultrasound scan, please contact the **Radiology Department, t: 020 7188 5490** (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm)
- choose option 1 to cancel and not rebook an appointment
- choose option 2 to reschedule or book a new appointment
- choose option 3 for results
- choose option 4 for patient transport
- choose option 5 for general enquiries