

## Fact Sheet

### Your 18-20 week ultrasound

[womensnewbornhealth.com.au](http://womensnewbornhealth.com.au)

At Westmead Hospital we recommend that you have a routine (screening) ultrasound done at 18-20 weeks of pregnancy to check on your baby and the placenta (also known as the afterbirth).

Ultrasound pictures are made using very high frequency (fast moving) sound waves. These types of scans have been used for over 30 years to look at early pregnancies and so we know that the test is accurate and safe for you and your baby.

Having the scan is usually an exciting time for you and your partner (who may attend if they wish) because you should be able to see your baby quite well on this ultrasound.

This scan is very important as it checks for the following:

- The number of babies
- The position of the placenta and the umbilical cord
- The amount of fluid around the baby
- That your cervix is closed
- The growth of your baby – the sonographer will check the growth of the long bones of the arms and legs, head and abdomen (belly)
- The scan checks for structural abnormalities of the baby such as problems with the spine, belly or lungs

You may want to know the sex of your baby (whether your baby is a boy or a girl). Please inform the sonographer if you do, or do not, want to know your baby's sex.

Occasionally, due to the way the baby is positioned, the sonographer will not be able to tell the sex of your baby. Furthermore, it is important to know that scanning is not 100% accurate at seeing whether the baby is a boy or a girl. We do not repeat scans purely for the purpose of determining the sex of your baby.

The majority of babies are completely normal but a small number (2-3%) of pregnancies will have an abnormality. Many, in fact just more than half of all major abnormalities, can be seen at the 18 week ultrasound.

Remember, although the ultrasound test is very good at finding these problems, it cannot detect every abnormality. For example, ultrasound tests cannot detect cerebral palsy, or autism, or some heart defects. Sometimes the defect is small, or too difficult, to see on ultrasound or it is caused by something which cannot be seen simply by looking at the baby's organs.

#### *17 week - 3Dimensional ultrasound scan*



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#### What should I do to prepare for my scan?

Very little preparation is necessary. You should wear comfortable clothing which makes scanning your belly easy and your bladder should be comfortably full to help the sonographer get the best pictures. Please bring any previous scans with you to your appointment.

Although your partner can be there with you, we generally advise that you don't bring young children with you, as they may distract you and the sonographer during the scan.

#### What should I expect during my scan?

Your ultrasound test will usually take about 30 minutes. You will be asked to lie on the examination bed, usually slightly on one side with your abdomen exposed and a warm, clear gel applied. The ultrasound transducer (a flat smooth probe) is gently run over your skin and pictures and measurements of the baby will be taken. The test is not painful for you and the baby cannot feel or hear anything during the scan.

The sonographer will sometimes point out things to you. Remember that they do have to look, and concentrate, very carefully while scanning and so may not talk with you all the time.

Quite often the sonographer will ask a doctor to come and check your scan. Do not be alarmed or upset as mostly this is quite routine and not because there is a problem.

Sometimes the position of your fetus (the way your baby is lying) makes it very difficult to see parts of the baby which need checking or to see the position of the placenta. If this happens, you may be asked to come back on another day or have a transvaginal scan done. With a transvaginal ultrasound, a special ultrasound probe is placed in the vagina to get clearer pictures. This procedure is not painful for you and is not dangerous for your baby.

#### What happens if an abnormality is found on my baby's scan?

In the unusual situation where an abnormality is found on your ultrasound scan, the doctor will discuss this with you. In the case of mild findings which are not serious, you may simply be asked to have another scan in a few weeks' time. With more significant findings, like a possible problem with the baby's chromosomes (DNA), you may be asked to have more testing done like an amniocentesis, or a more specialised type of ultrasound scan (for example a 3D scan), to help make a diagnosis.



You may also be referred to a doctor who is a specialist in the particular problem that has been found, or you may be referred to a doctor or counsellor who is a specialist in genetic problems so that you can understand exactly what the findings mean for you, for your baby and for your family. No matter what you decide to do concerning the problem that has been found, we will do our best to provide ongoing counselling and support.

The findings will usually also be discussed with your doctor so that they can help you understand the scan result.

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Your 18-20 week morphology scan is an important test to check on the health of your baby and the placenta. Although it is a very accurate and useful test it is not able to exclude or find every possible problem. If the scan is reported as normal you should be very reassured but also understand that this does not guarantee that no problems will occur further on in the pregnancy.

**We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.**

**Send your feedback to:**  
WSLHD-Get\_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au