

Patient Information

18-20 Week Screening Pregnancy Ultrasound

What is an 18-20 week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

An 18–20 week pregnancy screening ultrasound is a routine part of prenatal care. It is performed at this stage because the foetus (unborn baby) is large enough for its body structure and development to be assessed accurately. The ultrasound provides essential information, including:

- The number of foetuses.
- The age of the foetus.
- Confirmation of the delivery due date (not very accurate at this stage)
- Organs of the foetus, e.g., heart, stomach, spine, limbs
- The amount of fluid around the foetus.
- The location of the placenta (the organ that supplies nutrients and oxygen to the foetus) and appearance of the cervix (the neck of the uterus and part of the birth canal).

The screening is conducted using high-frequency soundwaves (ultrasound) to create real-time images on a screen, allowing for a detailed examination of the moving foetus.

Why would my doctor refer me to have this procedure?

Your doctor would refer you for an ultrasound screening as part of a routine check-up during your pregnancy. This scan helps ensure that the foetus is growing normally, including its limbs, heart, brain, and internal organs. Additionally, it allows doctors to detect some

abnormalities earlier than would otherwise be possible.

Can I have my scan earlier or later than 18-20 weeks?

While the ultrasound can be performed before or after this time frame, it is recommended to have the scan from 17 weeks onwards and preferably before 21 weeks for optimal visualization.

How do I prepare for an 18-20 week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

Very little preparation is needed for the ultrasound. It is advised to have some fluid in the bladder, but not to the point of discomfort, to ensure clear imaging of the abdominal area. Wear comfortable clothing that provides easy access to your entire abdominal region.

If you have young children, arrange for childcare beforehand and do not bring them to the scan appointment to minimize distractions and ensure a successful examination.

What happens during an 18-20 week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

During the ultrasound, you will lie on an examination couch with your abdomen exposed. A clear gel will be applied to your skin, which can be easily washed off afterward. The sonographer will gently move a smooth handheld device (transducer) across your



abdomen to capture real-time images of the foetus.

The screening ultrasound assesses the foetus's development from head to toe, and various measurements will be taken to determine the foetus's size and age. The sonographer will check the position of the placenta and the cervix, looking for any potential risks.

In some cases, the foetus may not be in an ideal position to see certain structures, and the sonographer might ask you to change positions. If necessary, a transvaginal ultrasound might be recommended for clearer images.

How long does an 18-20 week screening pregnancy ultrasound take?

The screening usually takes between 30–45 minutes.

What are the risks of an 18-20 week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

There are no known risks to the foetus or mother when having an abdominal ultrasound. Ultrasound uses high-frequency soundwaves and does not involve radiation.

What are the benefits of an 18-20 week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

The 18-20 week screening pregnancy ultrasound is a valuable screening test to assess foetal development. In most

pregnancies, foetal development is normal. However, in a small percentage of cases (1-2%), the scan can identify major structural abnormalities.

What happens if something abnormal is found on the 18-20 week screening pregnancy ultrasound?

Not all abnormalities can be seen on ultrasound, and the accuracy of ultrasound in detecting abnormalities is approximately 60%. In cases of suspected Down syndrome or other chromosomal abnormalities, additional tests such as amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling may be recommended for confirmation.

If abnormalities are detected, the radiologist or obstetrician sonologist will discuss the possible reasons and guide the discussion with your doctor about further investigation or treatment if needed.

What else is checked other than baby?

This scan is also going to aim to locate the placenta, specifically how far it is from the cervix (neck of the womb). 2 cm or more is normal. It will also check the length of the cervix. A normal cervix should be 35 mm or more on abdominal scan or 25 mm or more on internal/ vaginal ultrasound.

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