

# Pregnancy and Medical Imaging

## What you need to know



This handout explains what you need to know about medical imaging during pregnancy. It describes different types of imaging, and safety information for you and your baby. You will find answers to common questions so you can be informed and confident about you and your baby's health.



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## Why You Might Need Imaging During Pregnancy

Imaging tests are sometimes needed during pregnancy to check for health problems. These tests can help to keep you and your baby safe and healthy. Some reasons why you might need imaging include:

- Checking for problems, like broken bones or appendicitis.
- Monitoring health conditions, like gallstones or kidney stones.
- Making sure you get the right care during emergencies.



Talk with your care team about your questions and concerns. We are here to keep you and your baby safe!

## Different types of Imaging exams

The table below has information about different types of imaging exams and their safety during pregnancy.

Test	Why is this test done?	Is this test safe?
<b>Ultrasound</b>	Commonly used during pregnancy to check your baby's growth and health.	Completely safe. Ultrasound uses sound waves, not radiation.
<b>MRI</b> <i>Magnetic Resonance Imaging</i>	Takes detailed pictures of soft tissues and organs.	Generally safe. It does not use radiation. Contrast agents are avoided unless necessary.
<b>X-Rays</b>	Helps find injuries like broken bones.	X-rays use low levels of radiation. If an X-ray is needed, the benefits outweigh the risks.
<b>CT</b> <i>Computed Tomography Scan</i>	Finds serious problems like head injuries or internal bleeding.	Uses more radiation than x-rays, but modern equipment limits exposure. Only used when necessary. <b>Read more about CT scans on page 2.</b>

## What else should I know about CT scans?

- The amount of radiation used in normal CT imaging has **never** been shown to cause harm to an unborn child.
- If you have a CT scan of your chest or head, there is no risk to the baby from radiation.
- If you have a CT scan of your abdomen (belly) or pelvis, there might be a very slight risk to your baby. An unborn baby exposed to CT during pregnancy may have about a 1 in 1,000 higher chance of developing cancer as a child. **However, this risk has not been proven and may not exist at all.**
- If you need a CT scan to diagnose a serious or urgent problem, do not refuse it because of concerns about radiation. The best way to keep your baby healthy is to stay healthy yourself. Your baby depends on you to stay well during your entire pregnancy.

## Contrast material

- *Contrast* is a special dye that is used during some imaging tests to help your doctor see your blood vessels and organs more clearly.
- For some CT exams, you may need contrast injected into an arm vein.
- Contrast can cross the placenta to your baby, but it has been used during pregnancy for decades without harm.

## Cancer Risk

Exposure to radiation can sometimes increase the risk of cancer. However, the small amount of radiation used in most imaging tests has not been shown to cause harm or increase cancer risk. The possible risks are very small, and these risks should not stop you from having a test that is needed to keep you and your baby healthy. The benefits of the test are much greater than the potential risks.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Will imaging tests harm my baby?

Most imaging tests are safe during pregnancy. Ultrasound and MRI are very safe. X-rays and CT scans use small amounts of radiation, but the benefits of these tests are much greater than the risks.

### Can I refuse imaging tests?

It is your choice. However, it is important to understand that delaying or avoiding an imaging test might affect your or your baby's health. Please talk with your care team about your concerns.

### What if I have an imaging test before I know I am pregnant?

Tell your healthcare provider right away. Imaging tests in early pregnancy are usually very low-risk, and your doctor can check for any possible concerns.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- **UWMC – Montlake Imaging Services:** 206.598.6200
- **UWMC – Northwest Imaging Services:** 206.668.1302
- **Harborview Imaging Services:** 206.744.3105