Obstetrical Ultrasound Exam

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how to prepare for an obstetrical ultrasound exam, how it works, how it is done, what to expect, and how to get your results.

How to prepare for the exam:

- **If your pregnancy is less than 14 weeks**: Please come to your exam with a full bladder.
- **If your pregnancy is more than 14 weeks:** You do not need to do anything to prepare.
- Exam times can range from 45 mins to 90 mins. If you are pregnant with twins or triplets, it will be longer.
- A *transvaginal ultrasound* (inside the vagina) may be needed, and that will add more time. A chaperone (extra staff member) can stay in the room during the exam if you would like.
- For safety and to help your visit run smoothly, **please do not bring children with you to the clinic**. If you must bring children, another adult must come with you to supervise them. If another adult is not available, we may need to reschedule your appointment. Thank you for your understanding.
- Please do not bring more than 3 people with you to your ultrasound exam.

What is an Obstetric Ultrasound?

Ultrasound exams use sound waves to create images of the inside of the body. An *obstetric ultrasound* looks at the organs in your pelvic area and at the fetus. A *sonographer* (ultrasound technologist) uses a tool called a *handheld transducer* to take pictures.

How does exam work?

The sonographer will put gel on your skin on your lower abdomen (belly). They will move the transducer around and use some pressure to get the pictures.

You may have a second exam that uses a *transvaginal transducer,* which goes inside your vagina. Before the exam begins:

- Before the transvaginal exam, you will use the bathroom and empty your bladder.
- The sonographer will explain the exam, make sure you're comfortable, and ask for your consent.
- A chaperone (extra person) will be available to be in the room during the exam unless you decline.

During a transvaginal exam, a transvaginal transducer will be placed into your vagina. This helps your provider carefully check your pelvic organs, cervix and fetus. You will feel some pressure but it should not be painful. Tell the sonographer if you have any pain.

UWMC Imaging Services | Box 357115
1959 N.E. Pacific St., Seattle, WA 98195 | 206-598-6200

How do I get my results?

A Maternal Fetal Medicine doctor or a radiologist (imaging doctor) will review all the pictures and send a report to your ordering doctor. This report will then be available in your MyChart.

Questions?

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

- **UWMC Imaging Services:** 206.598.6200
- **UW Roosevelt Imaging Services:** 206.598.6868
- **Maternal Fetal Medicine front desk:** 206.598.6899
- **Harborview Imaging Services:** 206.744.3105
- **UW Eastside Clinic Imaging Services:** 206.598.8122

© University of Washington Medical Center
Document ID: PE0346
Published PFES: 2005, 2009, 2015, 2026
Clinician Review: 11/2026
Reprints on Health Online: healthonline.washington.edu

UWMC Imaging Services | Box 357115
1959 N.E. Pacific St., Seattle, WA 98195 | 206-598-6200