

What's an ultrasound?

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Pregnant or just had a baby?

The National Maternal Mental Health Hotline is a free, confidential, 24/7 help line. Text or call 1-833-TLC-MAMA for resources and support.

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An ultrasound is a safe and painless way to see inside your body. It shows you and your doctor an image of your uterus and the fetus.

What's an ultrasound and how is it used in pregnancy?

An ultrasound – also called a sonogram – helps your doctor find out whether the fetus is developing normally. Your doctor might recommend that you have 1 or more ultrasounds at different points in your pregnancy. It can be used to check the anatomy of the fetus for defects or problems.

Depending on how far along your pregnancy is, ultrasound images help your doctor:

- estimate your due date
- check things like the size and position of the fetus to make sure everything is normal
- see the position of the placenta
- see the amount of amniotic fluid in your uterus

- find multiple pregnancies (twins, triplets, etc.)

Ultrasounds can also be used to screen for certain birth defects, like Down syndrome.

How does an ultrasound work?

Ultrasounds use high frequency sound waves to create pictures of your fetus and reproductive organs (like your uterus and cervix). There are two ways to do an ultrasound during pregnancy – through the skin on your abdomen (belly), or through the inside of your vagina.

During an abdominal ultrasound, the doctor puts a little bit of gel on your stomach and rubs the ultrasound wand over your skin. The gel is cold and you might feel a little bit of pressure, but it's not painful.

During a vaginal ultrasound, the doctor puts an ultrasound wand into your vagina. It feels like a regular vaginal exam that you might get during a wellness visit (</learn/health-and-wellness/wellness-visit>). You might feel a little bit of pressure, but it's not painful.

Doctors, midwives, or trained ultrasound technicians will do your ultrasound and read the results.

How much does an ultrasound cost?

The cost of an ultrasound depends on the type of ultrasound you get and where you get it. Most insurance plans cover the cost of ultrasounds during pregnancy, but check with your insurance company to be sure.

You can visit your nearest Planned Parenthood health center (<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-center>) for free or low-cost ultrasounds, whether or not you have insurance. Your doctor might also be able to help you find affordable ultrasounds in your area.

More questions from patients:

What's a 4D ultrasound?

An ultrasound – also called a sonogram – helps your doctor look at your fetus to make sure it's developing normally. Ultrasounds use high frequency sound waves to create pictures of your fetus and reproductive organs (like your uterus and cervix). Your doctor might recommend that you have 1 or more ultrasounds at different times in your pregnancy.

A 4D ultrasound shows moving 3D images of your fetus. You may see their skin or the shape of their face or spot them yawning.

4D ultrasounds are considered safe. But it's recommended that you only have as many ultrasounds as is medically needed. Your health care provider might use a 4D scan, but only when it's really

needed, like to look more closely at the fetus’s heart or internal organs.

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