

Transvaginal ultrasound scan (TVS) in early pregnancy

Information for patients



Leeds
Maternity Care

You have received this leaflet as you are about to undergo a pelvic ultrasound scan to investigate an early pregnancy concern.

The best method of scanning at this early stage is a transvaginal (internal) ultrasound scan. This leaflet explains what this involves and the risks and benefits of the procedure.

What is a transabdominal gynaecology ultrasound scan?

An ultrasound scan uses high frequency sound waves (above the audible range) in order to see structures within the body.

A transabdominal gynaecology ultrasound scan involves putting ultrasound gel over your abdomen (tummy) and slowly moving a small plastic probe (transducer) over the skin covering your pelvis. The probe transmits high frequency sound waves into your body. Based on the reflections of these sound waves, the ultrasound machine then creates images of your pelvic organs.

A transabdominal gynaecology ultrasound scan aims to identify your uterus (womb), cervix, ovaries and any other structures in your pelvis. As part of the scan, your bladder and kidney may also be scanned.

What is a transvaginal ultrasound scan?

This is an internal scan where a probe is inserted into your vagina. Generally, the scan is well tolerated. It takes about 10 minutes to perform. A transvaginal scan tends to capture structures within the pelvis with much better clarity than a transabdominal scans. This means that making a diagnosis may be more likely by performing a transvaginal scan when compared to a transabdominal scan in early pregnancy.

Before the transvaginal scan

You will normally have the transabdominal scan prior to being offered the transvaginal scan.

Before the transvaginal scan you be asked to empty your bladder. The sonographer or doctor will ask you some questions and then ask you to remove the clothing below your waist in a private space, and you will be provided with a modesty sheet to cover yourself.

It is mandatory within the Trust that a formal chaperone is present for all intimate examinations. If you would like more information on this, please speak to a member of staff.

You are welcome to bring another person with you to your scan for support and this is something that we encourage. However, due to the limited space in the scan room, we request that only one other person attend with you.

We respectfully ask that no persons under the age of 18 attend.

During the scan

When you are settled on the couch, the sonographer or doctor will gently insert the tip of a round edged probe into the vagina. This probe is cleaned and disinfected between each patient and covered with a new probe cover, which is latex free. Water based gel is used for comfort.

An ultrasound image of your pelvic organs is seen on the monitor and findings will be discussed with you and documented in a report. Vaginal bleeding does not affect the quality of the scan.

Information giving

The healthcare practitioner carrying out the ultrasound will take their time to be sure of their findings, may have to scan in concentrated silence, and may need to get a second opinion to confirm their findings before informing you of the results.

Sometimes the scan reveals bad news. You will be informed of the scan findings in the scan room. You will have the opportunity to discuss all scan findings in more detail after the scan with a member of the gynaecology/ early pregnancy team.

Some women find it helpful to see the scan images, whether the news is good or bad. The person scanning you will give you the choice of what you wish to do.

Trainees

This is a teaching hospital and the department does train sonographers/doctors in transvaginal scanning. If you would rather not have a trainee in the room at the time of your scan please let us know.

Benefits

- Transvaginal ultrasound is the preferred best practice for early pregnancy scanning. There is no increased risk of miscarriage.
- In early pregnancy, a transvaginal ultrasound can give more detailed images compared to an abdominal approach which may give us a better understanding of your pregnancy.

Risks

- There are no risks to the safety of your pregnancy from having a transvaginal scan.

Alternatives

If you do not wish to have a transvaginal scan you may be offered a transabdominal scan only, where your pelvis is scanned through your abdomen (tummy). In these cases, a full bladder is necessary and you will need to drink approximately 500-1000mls of water an hour before your appointment time.

Please note that a transabdominal scan may not be as able to offer as clear a view of the pelvis as a transvaginal scan. This may mean that you are offered a further scan at a later date before a diagnosis can be made.

References / Sources of evidence

- National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE).
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng126>
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG).
<https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information/bleeding-and-or-pain-in-early-pregnancy/>

Questions / Notes

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