

Northampton Private Radiology

Information for Adult Patients Having an Ultrasound Scan

The Ultrasound department

The ultrasound scans will be performed at the Forrest Centre. Please report to the main reception here.

What is an Ultrasound Scan?

An ultrasound scan builds up a picture of part of the inside of the body using sound waves of a frequency above the audible range of the human ear. A small hand-held sensor, which is pressed carefully against the skin surface, both generates sound waves and detects any echoes reflected back off the surfaces and tissue boundaries of internal organs. The sensor can be moved over the skin to view the organ from different angles, the pictures being displayed on a TV monitor screen and recorded for subsequent study.

Ultrasound images complement other forms of scans and are widely used for many different parts of the body. They can also be used to study blood flow and to detect any narrowing or blockage of blood vessels, for example, in the neck.

Ultrasound is also used for intimate examinations, for example of the prostate gland in men or the womb or ovaries in women. For some of these examinations it may be necessary to place an ultrasound probe in the vagina or the rectum to look at internal structures. If you are having an intimate examination the radiologist will describe the procedure to you, and your consent will be sought. In these cases, it is normal for a third person (a “chaperone”) to be present and, if one is not, you may request this if you wish.

Are there any risks?

No, there are no known risks and it is considered to be very safe.

Are you required to make any special preparations in advance?

Often it is necessary to prepare for the scan. For example, if your pelvis, kidney or bladder are to be scanned, you may be required to ensure that your bladder is full before the examination can begin. For some examinations such as gall bladder and pancreas, you may be required to fast for a specified number of hours. If so, this will be explained in the accompanying appointment letter. You should tell the radiology department in advance if you have had a similar ultrasound recently.

Can you bring a relative / friend?

Yes, you may be accompanied.

When you arrive

Please go to the reception desk at the Forrest Centre, after which you will be shown where to wait until collected by a member of staff.

Within the Department the toilets and public phone are clearly signposted, should you need to use them at any time. However, do remember that if you have been asked to drink to fill your bladder, try to not use the toilet until after the examination.

Upon collection

You will be advised if you have to remove any clothes before entering the examination room, in which case you will be shown to a private cubicle where you may take off your outer garments. For some examinations you will be asked to put on the hospital gown and dressing gown provided, but you may prefer to bring your own dressing gown. You should place your clothes and personal belongings either in a basket, which you will keep with you, or in a secure locker.

Who will you see?

You will be cared for by a small team and seen by a radiologist or a sonographer depending upon the type of investigation you are having. During the scan the radiologist will look at the images on the television screen and, if necessary, look at the record of the images later, before writing a report.

What happens during the scan?

You may be asked some questions about your health and in particular your current symptoms, and the doctor may examine you briefly. You will be invited to lie down on a couch, and the lights in the room may be dimmed so that the pictures on the television screen can be seen more clearly. A gel will be applied to your skin over the area to be scanned, for example the abdomen. The gel allows the sensor to slide easily over the skin and helps to produce clearer pictures.

Sometimes you will be on your back or you may be asked to turn on your side, lie flat on your stomach or even to stand during the examination. There is usually help for those who find this difficult. You may be asked to take deep breaths and to hold your breath for a few moments. For a scan of the bladder, the bladder may occasionally not be full enough for the examination and you may be asked to drink more fluid. If your bladder is uncomfortably full you should tell the radiologist or sonographer, so that this part of the examination can be completed as soon as possible. You could then leave the examination room to empty your bladder before returning for any further examination.

The radiologist sits or stands beside you, slowly moving the sensor over your skin while viewing the images on the screen. Records of selected images will be made so that they can be viewed later. Upon completion, the gel will be wiped off and you will be free to get dressed.

The details of intimate examinations will be explained at the time and your consent will be sought. If you don't already have an appointment to see your referring doctor, you should confirm with the radiologist/sonographer how you should obtain one.

Will it be uncomfortable?

Ultrasound itself does not produce discomfort and apart from the sensor on your skin you will not feel anything. If a full bladder is required, though, there may be some associated discomfort. Ultra sound is often carried out to try and find out the reason why a patient has severe abdominal or pelvic pain. In these circumstances, some pressure may be applied to the skin surface over an inflamed organ, for example, the gallbladder, to check what is causing the pain. This may increase the amount of pain coming from that organ temporarily, but would be no worse than, for example, being examined by a doctor on a ward.

How long will it take?

The process of carrying out a scan usually takes about 10 - 15 minutes. Unless you are delayed, for example by emergency patients, your total time in the Department is likely to be about 30-40 minutes.

Are there any side-effects?

No. You can drive home afterwards, and return to work as necessary.

Can you eat and drink afterwards?

Yes, do so normally.

When will you get the results?

After the scan, the images will be examined further by the radiologist, who will prepare a report on his/her findings. This may take some time to reach your referring doctor, but is normally about 48hours.

If you have a query?

If you have a query about having the ultrasound scan, please ring the Forrest centre on 0800 756 9 746 during office hours.