

Pregnancy ultrasound

Understanding diagnostic and non-diagnostic ultrasound in pregnancy

Ultrasound is a routine part of prenatal care that can be used to check the development, growth and wellbeing of unborn babies. Medical diagnostic ultrasound uses sound waves to create images of the unborn baby and is considered safe and suitable for use during pregnancy when performed by qualified sonographers or clinicians.

What you need to know

- A diagnostic ultrasound is an important and safe tool used as part of caring for you and your unborn baby's health and development.
- A qualified professional should perform your ultrasound.
- Your prenatal care team will advise when an ultrasound is needed.
- The sex of the baby and keepsake images may be made available, but this is not necessarily part of a diagnostic ultrasound.
- Generally diagnostic ultrasounds attract a Medicare rebate while non-diagnostic ultrasounds do not.

What is a pregnancy ultrasound?

Diagnostic ultrasounds during pregnancy provide important information to your prenatal care team so that you and the baby can get the right care and the best possible outcomes.

Clinicians who are trained to operate the machine safely use low-power settings and low sound wave exposure when producing the images as extra safety steps.

It is common to have more than one diagnostic ultrasound during your pregnancy, and your prenatal care team will let you know when they are needed and will give you a request form. You can take the request form to any accredited imaging provider that performs pregnancy ultrasounds.

Who should perform a pregnancy ultrasound?

A diagnostic ultrasound can only be done by a clinician qualified in ultrasound, for example a sonographer. When booking your scan, ask if the imaging provider is accredited to the Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation Scheme (DIAS) Standards. This will ensure the staff performing the ultrasound are qualified.

Diagnostic ultrasounds

The medical purpose of ultrasound during pregnancy is to check the health and development of the unborn baby, and it is known as a diagnostic ultrasound. It usually takes place in a medical clinic or hospital. Although your prenatal care team may recommend further diagnostic scans based on your individual circumstance, there are three routinely recommended diagnostic scans.

Table 1 Routinely recommended diagnostic ultrasound scans

Scan	Gestational age	Purpose
Pregnancy dating ultrasound	7-11 weeks (8 weeks ideally)	Accurately dates the pregnancy and helps confirm due date.
Early baby development scan	12-13.6 weeks	Assesses early fetal structural development which would not be detected by Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT). Detects 50-70% of development issues that would later be detected at a morphology scan (see below). These early findings can help guide further testing and allow time for families to consider and make decisions about these or other possible interventions.
Detailed baby anatomy scan	18-22 weeks	It is the most important and detailed examination of the three. The baby has grown significantly larger and more complex organs have developed at this stage allowing a more detailed examination of your baby. It examines the baby's organs, growth and the placenta and cervix.

Growth scans (when recommended)

Growth scans are additional diagnostic ultrasounds that may be recommended later in pregnancy if there are concerns about your baby's growth or wellbeing, or if you have risk factors that mean your pregnancy needs closer monitoring. They are not routinely required for every pregnancy. Your prenatal team will advise when growth scans are needed.



Non-diagnostic ultrasounds

- A non-diagnostic ultrasound is a scan that has not been recommended by your prenatal health team.
- If you purchase a non-diagnostic ultrasound as an experience, for reassurance or a “gender reveal”, you should know that it is not a diagnostic ultrasound and cannot give information about the baby’s development and health.
- Sometimes, these non-diagnostic ultrasounds are performed by people who are not clinicians.
- Ultrasound for “gender reveals”, reassurance or experience images **do not replace diagnostic ultrasound scans** and are **not recommended** for medical information or to diagnose conditions.
- Talk to your prenatal health team if you want an image of your baby, have concerns about your pregnancy or want to know the sex. If you are having the [NIPT blood test](#), this is also a way of reliably determining the baby's sex.

Tips to remember

- Your prenatal care team is the best source of information about ultrasound during pregnancy.
- Talk to your prenatal care team if you are anxious or unsure about when an ultrasound is needed.
- Non-diagnostic ultrasounds offered in baby stores or other non-medical settings are **not recommended**.
- Ultrasound for “gender reveals”, reassurance or experience images **do not replace diagnostic ultrasound scans** and are **not recommended** for medical information or to diagnose conditions.
- Check if the place performing the ultrasound is accredited to the DIAS Standards when booking your appointment.

For more information

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For more information about your healthcare rights, download the [Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights](#).

For more information on how the Commission is ensuring the health care you receive is of [high quality](#), please visit [safetyandquality.gov.au](#).

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