

NHS Fetal Anomaly Screening Programme

Information about the early pregnancy scan

What is the scan for?

The scan is carried out by specially trained staff called sonographers. Its purpose is to:

- check the baby's heartbeat to confirm the baby is alive
- see if there is more than one baby
- measure the baby to estimate how many weeks' pregnant you are
- check for major problems with the baby that may be obvious at this early stage

Screening for Down's syndrome, Edwards' syndrome and Patau's syndrome

Screening is your choice. You do not have to have the screening test. Some people want to find out if their baby has Down's syndrome, Edwards' syndrome or Patau's syndrome and some do not.

If you chose to have screening for these conditions, the scan is one part of the screening test. The second part is a blood test from you. The scan can only be done when the baby is a certain size. The information from these 2 tests is combined to work out the chance of the baby having Down's syndrome, Edwards' syndrome or Patau's syndrome.

If you are too far on in your pregnancy to have the combined test for Down's syndrome, you will be offered a blood test between 14 and 20 weeks of pregnancy. This test is not quite as accurate as the combined test. If you are too far on in your pregnancy to have the combined test for Edwards' syndrome and Patau's syndrome, you will be offered a 20-week scan.

It is important to attend any further appointments if you wish to have screening for Down's syndrome, and/or Edwards' syndrome or Patau's



syndrome and to complete both parts of the tests – the scan and blood test.

The scan

We may have asked you to come with a full bladder – this is to help provide clearer pictures. For the sonographer to get good images of the baby, we carry out the scan in a dimly lit room.

Having the scan does not hurt but the sonographer may need to apply slight pressure to get the best views of the baby. This might be uncomfortable. A black and white picture of the baby will then be seen on the ultrasound screen.

The appointment usually takes around 20 minutes.

1. First, we ask you to lie on a couch.
2. Then we ask you to raise your top to your chest and lower your skirt or trousers to your hips.
3. We tuck tissue paper around your clothing to protect it from the ultrasound gel, which we then put on your tummy.
4. The sonographer then passes a hand-held device called a probe over your skin to carefully examine the baby's body. The gel makes sure there is good contact between the probe and your skin.

Sometimes it is difficult to get a good picture if:

- the baby is lying in an awkward position
- you are above average weight

This does not mean there is anything to worry about. We may have to repeat the scan or scan trans-vaginally. Scanning trans-vaginally uses a long, thin probe that is covered with gel and a plastic/latex sheath and is inserted into the vagina.

Any scan during your pregnancy may pick up physical problems with the baby. You will always be told if anything unexpected is found during a scan.

Safety of the test

There are no known risks to the baby or the mother from having an ultrasound scan but it is important that you consider carefully whether or not to have the early pregnancy scan.

Find out how Public Health England and the NHS use and protect your screening information at www.gov.uk/phe/screening-data

Public Health England (PHE) created this leaflet on behalf of the NHS.

Possible results of this scan

In most cases the scan will show that the baby appears to be developing as expected.

Occasionally, major conditions can be seen at this early scan – for example, if a baby has anencephaly (a problem with the development of the baby's brain and skull).

Other conditions are more difficult to see at this stage of pregnancy as the baby is very tiny. Some conditions only develop later in pregnancy.

If the baby is not developing as expected, we will refer you to a specialist to discuss this further.

If the sonographer is unable to complete the scan, and screening for Down's syndrome, and/or Edwards' syndrome or Patau's syndrome was not possible today, you will be offered a different blood test for Down's syndrome screening which your midwife can perform between 14 and 20 weeks of pregnancy.

If you want to have the 20-week scan, make sure you have booked your appointment.

It is your choice whether or not to have the scan

If you choose not to have the screening test for Down's syndrome, and/or Edwards' syndrome and Patau's syndrome, the rest of your antenatal care will be unaffected.

Please let the receptionist know if you choose not to have the scan or if you would like to speak to someone for further information.