

Isolated and increased nuchal fold

Information for healthcare professionals

Aim of leaflet

The aim of this document is to provide information for healthcare professionals about isolated and increased nuchal fold (NF) identified at the 18⁺⁰ to 20⁺⁶ weeks fetal anomaly scan.

What is it?

NF (sometimes referred to as nuchal oedema) is the term used to describe the tissue or fat pad at the posterior aspect of the fetal neck in the second trimester of pregnancy. Increased nuchal fold is not to be confused with increased nuchal translucency (NT) at the first trimester scan.

An 'increased' NF is where the distance between the skin and the occipital bone measures greater than 6mm in diameter at the 18⁺⁰ to 20⁺⁶ weeks fetal anomaly ultrasound scan. Unlike NT it should be measured in the transverse plane at the level of the cerebellum.

What causes it?

The majority of fetuses identified with an isolated and increased nuchal fold of more than 6mm at the mid-trimester scan are normal.² An increased NF can be associated with:

- chromosomal or genetic conditions
- congenital heart abnormality
- other conditions which may cause hydrops fetalis

How common is it?

Isolated and increased NF is seen in less than 1% of pregnancies at 18⁺⁰ to 20⁺⁶ weeks gestation and the majority of these have a normal outcome.



Care following the ultrasound examination

It is important that the woman is given clear information about what has been found at the ultrasound examination. Initially, this explanation will be given by the sonographer who undertook the scan.

Information should be tailored to the individual and given in a staged, unhurried and sympathetic way. The woman may be shocked or upset and, for this reason, might not absorb what the sonographer says. She should be offered an information leaflet about the finding which she can take away and read in her own time.

The woman should be offered another appointment to see her obstetrician (or midwife) to further discuss the findings and then referred to an ultrasound specialist and/or fetal medicine specialist for a more detailed ultrasound examination where further tests such as amniocentesis may also be offered.

Contact information about agencies that can provide external support such as Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC), should be offered to the woman.³

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC)

ARC provides impartial information and individual support to parents whether they are going through antenatal screening or whose unborn baby has been diagnosed with an abnormality.

73 Charlotte Street

London

W1T 4PN

Helpline: 0207 631 0285

Email: info@arc-uk.org

Website: www.arc-uk.org

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Reference list

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