



Why Sonograms Should Be Performed Only When Medically Indicated

The American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM) and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) believe that the use of ultrasound without a medical indication is inappropriate and contradicts the responsible practice of medicine.

As more advanced ultrasound technologies are becoming available, expectant mothers and their families have been requesting fetal keepsake videos and portraits. As such, ultrasound professionals are facing increasing pressure from their patients to perform ultrasound examinations for nonmedical purposes.

The medical community has expressed concern about performing ultrasound examinations simply to provide a pretty picture or determine fetal sex.

Although there are no confirmed biological effects on patients at the present time, the possibility exists that such biological effects may be identified in the future. Therefore, the AIUM recommends that ultrasound should be used only when the patient's physician indicates that it will provide medical benefit to the patient.

Past AIUM President, Alfred B. Kurtz, MD, warns an entertainment sonogram is a misuse of ultrasound technology and should not be offered. It should not replace a medically indicated ultrasound examination.

The FDA also warns exposing the fetus to ultrasound with no anticipation of medical benefit is not justified. It has cautioned that persons who promote, sell or lease ultrasound equipment for making keepsake fetal videos should know that the FDA views this as an unapproved use of a medical device. Those who subject individuals to ultrasound exposure using a diagnostic ultrasound device (a prescription device) without a physician's order may be in violation of state or local laws or regulations regarding use of a prescription medical device.

Thus, this practice believes it is better to be safe than sorry. Therefore, we perform sonograms only when medically indicated.



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF
ULTRASOUND IN MEDICINE

What is Ultrasound?

Ultrasound is like ordinary sound except its frequency, or pitch, is higher than people can hear. When sent into the body from a handheld device called a transducer, ultrasound travels through tissue and is reflected from internal structures. The reflections, or "echoes," return to the transducer where they are converted electronically into images. These continuously changing images are displayed on a monitor and may be recorded on videotape or film.

Is Ultrasound Safe?

There are no known harmful effects associated with the medical use of ultrasound. Although the possibility exists that biological effects may be identified in the future, current information indicates that the benefits to patients far outweigh any potential risks.

Why Do I Need an Obstetric Ultrasound Examination?

Your doctor may recommend an obstetric ultrasound examination to help determine when your baby is due or to evaluate your baby's growth and well-being. Ultrasound may also be used to confirm the number of babies you are carrying, to check the baby's position, or to evaluate your uterus and ovaries.

Are There Any Special Preparations for the Examination?

You may be asked to arrive at your appointment with a full bladder. Otherwise, there are no special preparations for an obstetric ultrasound examination.

How is an Obstetric Ultrasound Examination Performed?

The transducer is placed on the skin surface after a gel is applied to provide better contact. The gel may feel cool and may temporarily stain clothes, so you may want to wear easily washable clothing. To reduce the distance between the baby and the transducer, an endovaginal ultrasound examination may also be performed using a specialized transducer inserted into the vaginal canal. A paper or cloth gown will be provided if necessary. The room is usually darkened during the examination so the examiner can see a monitor screen.

How Will I Feel During the Examination?

There is no pain involved in an ultrasound examination unless the area being examined is sensitive. When discomfort occurs, it is usually very tolerable.

Who Will Perform the Examination?

The examination is usually performed by a specially trained health care professional called a sonographer or by a doctor trained in sonography. The images obtained from the examination will be interpreted by a doctor. This interpretation may not be available immediately after you have your examination.

What Are the Limitations of This Examination?

The ultrasound examination quality depends on the ultrasound equipment used and the experience and knowledge of the examiner and the interpreting physician. The baby's position and distance from the transducer may affect ultrasound examination quality.