



ECS and NIPT: What's the difference?

Two common prenatal genetic tests that ask different questions and give different answers.

You may be offered both **Expanded Carrier Screening (ECS)** and **Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT)** during pregnancy or before conceiving. They are both genetic tests but they are asking completely different questions about your pregnancy. Understanding the difference helps you make sense of your results.

Expanded Carrier Screening (ECS)

Looks for genetic conditions your baby could inherit from you and your partner. These are conditions written into your DNA before conception ever happens.



ECS asks: "What specific conditions could I pass on to a child?"

Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT)

Looks for genetic conditions that arise after conception. These are new chromosomal changes in this specific pregnancy, not something you carry.



NIPT asks: "Does this specific pregnancy show signs of a chromosomal condition?"

HOW THEY COMPARE

	EXPANDED CARRIER SCREENING (ECS)	NON-INVASIVE PRENATAL TESTING (NIPT)
What it looks at	Identifies genetic variants (recessive) that you and your partner carry in your DNA.	Fetal DNA that is circulating in the mother's blood during the pregnancy.
What it screens for	Inherited single-gene conditions (e.g., cystic fibrosis, spinal muscular atrophy).	Chromosomal conditions arising in the fetus (e.g., Down syndrome, trisomy 18, trisomy 13).
When it's done	Before pregnancy (saliva or blood test).	During pregnancy (blood test).
What a positive result means	You are a carrier of one or more recessive genetic conditions. Your partner's result will determine the risk to the pregnancy.	Increased chance the fetus has a chromosomal condition. Further diagnostic testing of the pregnancy is offered in cases of a positive NIPT result.
Does it diagnose?	No. It identifies carrier status only, not disease in you or your baby. In rare cases, carriers can experience symptoms that require medical attention.	No. It is a screening test only. A clear answer requires diagnostic testing of the pregnancy (CVS or amniocentesis) to confirm.
Who it's for	Anyone planning or in early pregnancy.	Pregnant individuals, typically from the first trimester onward.



These tests work together, not instead of each other.

ECS shows the genetic conditions you already carry. NIPT identifies possible chromosome differences in a pregnancy. Many people choose to have both tests done.