

**Ultrasound in Pregnancy**

Ultrasound is used in pregnancy to evaluate the well being of baby and mother. It is technology that uses high frequency, low intensity sound waves to present a picture of the baby at that particular moment in time.

Ultrasound appears to be safe for the mother and does not appear to harm the fetus or cause severe birth defects. It is less clear if ultrasound causes slight changes in the growth of babies. Ultrasound does not change the health outcome of the babies in low risk pregnancies.

Ultrasound is used to determine the health of your baby in specific circumstances or as a screening tool in pregnancy.

The “routine” ultrasounds are screening tools that are offered on two occasions and recommended by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada:

1. Early ultrasound- this ultrasound occurs between 11-14 weeks pregnancy and used to determine the age of the pregnancy even if the mother is certain about her menstrual history.
2. Anatomical ultrasound- occurs between 18-22 weeks pregnancy to check for any structural abnormalities of the baby. It also checks the location of the placenta and the woman’s uterus.

Depending on timing, you may undergo a third ultrasound if you choose to have genetic screening. Integrated prenatal screening includes an ultrasound between 11-13 weeks pregnancy. It is sometimes included in the “dating” ultrasound and sometimes is not.

Your midwife may recommend an ultrasound if certain conditions have developed in your pregnancy. Some examples of this would be:

* Confirmation of pregnancy
* Suspicion of multiple pregnancy
* Bleeding that has occurred for no known reason
* Concerns about the baby’s growth
* To confirm the position of the baby
* Confirmation of well-being if baby is “overdue”

Advantages to Ultrasound:

* Can detect serious abnormalities
* Determines the location of the placenta
* Detects multiple pregnancy
* Allows delivery to occur at an appropriate place if there has been a condition detected

Disadvantages to Ultrasound

* Not 100% accurate-conditions may be missed
* Abnormality detected that actually doesn’t exist
* A minor finding on ultrasound may change your feelings about the pregnancy
* “soft signs” for potential abnormalities are detected but subsequently disappear, causing unnecessary stress for the parents and extra use of ultrasounds for baby

# Three Dimensional Ultrasound

3D ultrasounds are becoming more and more popular for use in pregnancy. These ultrasounds are performed by private companies and charge a fee for their services. Many women and their families report enjoying the ultrasound. Although being used increasingly for clinical diagnoses in other countries, 3D ultrasound is more commonly a social event and not recommended by the SOGC.