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Ultrasound during pregnancy – what you need to know

Ultrasound has been used during pregnancy for over 40 years. No direct harmful impact on child or mother has ever been identified. With today's modern methods, there is therefore no reason to be apprehensive about the effect on your unborn child.

An ultrasound examination will provide answers to the following questions:

In the first trimester (11th – 14th week of pregnancy)

- Proof that the child is alive and correctly positioned in the uterus
- Gestational age. This is very important, e.g. in identifying a reduced rate of growth in the later stages of pregnancy
- Detection of multiple pregnancy
- Checking for severe malformations
- Measurement of nuchal translucency to assess the risk of chromosomal abnormalities (e.g. Down's syndrome)

In the second trimester (20th – 23rd week of pregnancy)

- Assessment of amount of amniotic fluid and rate of growth
- Detection of any malformation of organs, spine, head and limbs
- Determination of the position of the placenta

In the third trimester (30th – 32nd week of pregnancy)

- The emphasis is now on monitoring fetal growth. A child of normal size and an appropriate amount of amniotic fluid confirm that the placenta is functioning as it should.
- Some malformations cannot be detected until the later stages of pregnancy; early identification will ensure the child receives optimum care and treatment after birth.

Results of the ultrasound examination

If the results of your ultrasound examination are normal, it is more than likely that everything is in order, although you will obviously appreciate that we cannot give any guarantees. Ultrasound is a very good means of identifying serious fetal problems (90% accuracy), i.e. problems which may jeopardise the child's survival.

Ultrasound is fairly good (75% accuracy) for identifying problems which will require intensive treatment and care. Ultrasound is less suited (30% accuracy) to



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detecting minor malformations (e.g. extra fingers), because it may not always be easy to spot this sort of detail. Sometimes we can also detect small changes (head shape, for example) which are not serious in themselves, but which may be signs of other problems. If such problems can be ruled out, there is no need to pay any further attention to the sign itself.

Remember that some developmental disorders only emerge as the pregnancy proceeds, making them difficult or impossible to detect in the first half of pregnancy.

Normal ultrasound results are very reassuring and will guide the continuing care you receive during pregnancy. If a problem is detected, an ultrasound examination can give both you and us the data we need to make informed decisions. You can start to prepare for the birth of a child who will need more care than usual, for example. The birth can be planned at a suitable clinic or hospital. It may be possible to initiate treatment during pregnancy, perhaps with a very positive effect on the baby's health.

But in the event that ultrasound reveals a serious fetal disorder, you may find yourself confronted with a difficult ethical decision: "Should I continue the pregnancy or seek a termination?" Some may prefer to accept the dictates of nature rather than engage with this type of question. You may therefore not wish to have ultrasound examinations - please let us know if that is the case. We will of course be pleased to provide further information if you are unsure about anything, or have any other questions.

Cost of ultrasound examinations

For routine examinations during weeks 11 to 21 and for ultrasound as required (e.g. in the case of complications during pregnancy), all costs are covered by your health insurance.

If you would like an ultrasound at each appointment, with information about your baby's estimated weight, please let us know. The cost of this (CHF 80 to 100) is not covered by your health insurance and will be invoiced to you direct.



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Please note:

The quality of ultrasound examinations depends on various factors. The baby may not be optimally positioned to allow a conclusive evaluation of some organs and structures, for example. The thickness of the mother's abdominal wall also affects the quality of the examination.

The examination between the 20th and 23rd week of pregnancy to rule out malformations requires extra attention and concentration. It is therefore preferable not to bring young children with you to this appointment.

- I consent to ultrasound examinations on my unborn child
- I consent to ultrasound examinations on my unborn child subject to the following restriction:
- I do not wish to have ultrasound examinations. I have the following questions/objections:

With my signature I confirm I have read and understood this information sheet.

Zurich, (date):

Patient's signature: