

Having an Ultrasound Examination

A guide to the test

Published as a service to medicine by

KeiMed

An **OLYMPUS** Group Company

suppliers of

ALOKA
Ultrasound Equipment

You have been advised to have an ultrasound examination to help find the cause of your problems. This leaflet is designed to explain what the examination involves. It may not answer all your questions, so if you have any worries, please do not hesitate to ask the staff who are performing the test - they are always glad to be of help.

WHAT IS AN ULTRASOUND EXAMINATION?

An ultrasound examination obtains a picture of the inside of the body without the use of X-rays. It involves high frequency sound waves which are transmitted through the skin and reflected by the internal organs and structures. These 'echoes' form a picture on a screen which can be examined for any abnormalities. There is no pain from an ultrasound examination.

Many parts of the body can be investigated by ultrasound but the technique is commonly used to examine the abdominal organs (liver and kidney), the pelvis, the heart and the major blood vessels. Other areas which may be examined include the eyes, breasts, and thyroid gland. Most pregnancies are now monitored by ultrasound examination to assess the age, health and position of the unborn baby.

Areas of the body which cannot be successfully examined by ultrasound are those covered by bone, for example the adult brain, and those filled with air, like the lungs. Abnormalities which may show up on an ultrasound examination include cysts, tumours and infections. Blockages in major blood vessels can also be detected. Ultrasound is a very safe technique and can be used to examine adults, children and babies.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

The preparation: For most ultrasound examinations no specific care is needed before the test. However, to examine certain areas of the body successfully, special preparation is sometimes required.

If you are having a pelvic examination, the internal organs can be seen better if you have a full bladder. You may therefore be asked to drink 1-1½ pints of fluid, 4-6 large glasses - about 45 minutes before the test. If you are having your gall bladder or pancreas investigated you may be instructed to stop eating for 12 hours before the test and to

drink clear fluids only. Because high frequency sound waves will not pass through air, gas in the bowel may obscure the internal organs. If your liver or kidneys are being investigated you should avoid fizzy drinks and foods such as beans, which may cause wind, for 1-2 days before the test.

If the area to be examined is underneath your clothing you may be asked to put on a hospital gown. There is no need to remove false teeth, contact lenses or jewellery.

DURING THE TEST

In the examination room you will be made comfortable on a couch, lying in a position which allows the operator to examine the area needing investigation. The room will be slightly darkened and a screen with the ultrasound image will be beside the bed. Only one person will perform the test but other staff may also be present.

Clear mineral oil or gel will be put on your skin over the area being examined. This helps the transmission of the sound waves through the skin. The gel will wipe off easily after the test, but it is best not to wear any clothes which could be damaged by stains.

The operator will then slide a small hand-held instrument transmitting the sound waves over the skin and examine the pictures displayed on the screen. The instrument causes no pain but if the area being examined is already a little tender, there may be minor discomfort if the operator has to press more firmly in order to obtain a clear picture.

The examination may take between 10 and 45 minutes during which time you may be asked to change position to allow the area to be looked at from different angles.

AFTER THE TEST

If you are having the ultrasound examination as an out-patient, it is likely that you will be allowed to return home after the test. Providing no other investigations are required, you will be able to eat, drink and resume normal activities as soon as you wish.

A report of the examination will be sent to your doctor, You should discuss details of the result and any necessary treatment with your GP or hospital specialist - whoever recommended you to have the test.