Liver Transplant Ultrasound

About your exam

What is liver transplant ultrasound?
Ultrasound studies of a liver transplant use sound waves to take pictures of your transplanted liver. The liver, the blood vessels to and from the liver, and the biliary system (bile ducts) are studied. The gallbladder is not studied because it was removed with your original liver.

How does the exam work?
Ultrasound sends sound waves into the body using a transducer, a hand-held device that sends and receives sound waves. After gel is applied to the skin, the sonographer (ultrasound technologist) presses the device against the skin to take pictures, which then appear on a screen. As the sound waves reflect back from the body’s fluids and tissues, a picture is created. You may be asked to hold your breath from time to time so that the pictures are clear.

How should I prepare for a liver transplant ultrasound?
- You do not need to prepare in any special way for this exam.
- If you are also having a liver biopsy, you must have nothing by mouth for at least 6 hours before your exam. A liver biopsy is a procedure where the doctor removes a tissue sample from the liver and sends it to the lab to be studied.
- Wear loose-fitting, comfortable clothes for your exam.
How is the exam done?

1. You will lie on an exam table.
2. A warm gel is applied to your abdomen to help the transducer make contact with your skin.
3. The sonographer then presses the transducer against your skin and sweeps it over your abdomen.
4. During the exam, you may be asked to hold your breath for 10 to 15 seconds at a time.
5. The radiologist may take more pictures after the sonographer is done.

What will I feel during the exam?

- Ultrasound of the liver is fast, painless, and easy. You will feel the sonographer apply warm gel to your abdomen and press the transducer against your skin. You may be asked to roll on either side or change positions. There is little or no discomfort with the exam. It usually lasts less than 45 minutes.
- The area of the incision may be quite sore right after surgery, so you may feel some discomfort during the ultrasound. Ultrasound of the liver transplant is done right after the transplant surgery, and usually 1 to 2 more times during the first week. Since blood vessel problems are common during the first week, the blood vessels are checked often.
- If a biopsy of the liver transplant is needed, ultrasound is used to mark a safe area of liver to be sampled. The biopsy area is marked on your skin, and then you are sent to the day procedure unit on 4-South. The biopsy is done by the hepatologist (liver specialist).

Who interprets the results of the exam and how do I get them?

The radiologist, who specializes in ultrasound, will review the pictures and send the report to your referring doctor. You will receive results from your doctor who ordered the test. In some cases, the radiologist may talk with you about early findings when your exam is over.