

## Ultrasound: Abdominal Exam

### *How to prepare and what to expect*

*This handout explains how to prepare for an abdominal ultrasound exam, how it works, how it is done, what you will feel during the exam, and how to get your results.*

### **What is an abdominal ultrasound exam?**

*Ultrasound* uses sound waves to make images of the inside of the body. An abdominal ultrasound can help doctors diagnose problems in the liver, gallbladder, biliary system (bile ducts), spleen, pancreas, kidneys, and bladder. Ultrasound images also show the blood vessels in the abdomen.

### **How does the exam work?**

The *sonographer* (ultrasound technologist) will use a hand-held device that sends and receives sound waves. This device is called a *transducer*.

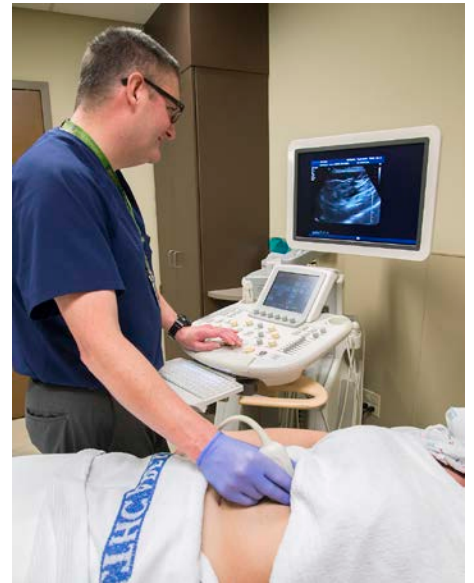
Gel will be applied to your skin, and the sonographer will then lightly press the transducer against your skin. As the sound waves bounce off your body fluids and tissues, they create an image of the inside of your abdomen. This image will display on a computer monitor for your doctor to see.

### **How should I prepare?**

- Wear a loose-fitting, comfortable, 2-piece outfit. Only your abdomen needs to be exposed during the exam.
- If your ultrasound will study your **gallbladder** or **biliary system**, see “Fasting” below.
- If your ultrasound will not study your gall bladder and bile ducts, you may eat and drink as usual.

### **Fasting**

If your ultrasound was ordered to study your gallbladder or biliary system, you must fast (not eat anything) for at least 6 hours before your exam.



*During your ultrasound exam, the sonographer will lightly press the transducer against your skin.*

When we eat, the gallbladder contracts and releases bile to help digest the food. If you eat anything within 6 hours of your exam, your gallbladder may not look normal in the ultrasound images.

During your fast, you may drink clear liquids such as black coffee, tea, and water. Do **not** drink anything that contains fat or sugar.

## **What can I expect during the exam?**

- You will lie on an exam table.
- The sonographer will move your clothing away from your abdomen and then apply a warm gel to the area. This gel helps the transducer make contact with your skin.
- The sonographer will then press the transducer against your skin and move it around to take the images.
- If needed, the radiologist may take more pictures after the sonographer is done.
- The exam usually takes less than 45 minutes.

## **What will I feel during the exam?**

- There is little or no discomfort during an ultrasound exam of the abdomen.
- You will feel the sonographer apply warm gel to your abdomen. You will feel slight pressure as the transducer is moved over your skin.
- You may be asked to roll on your side, or change your position.

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

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

### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- UWMC Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- UW Roosevelt Imaging Services: 206.598.6868
- Harborview Imaging Services: 206.744.3105