

Ultrasound: Pelvic Exam

How to prepare and what to expect

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

What is a pelvic ultrasound?

Ultrasound exams use sound waves to create images of the inside of your body. A *pelvic* ultrasound checks the health of your pelvic organs.

- In women, this exam studies the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, and other tissues.
- In men, this exam studies the bladder and the prostate gland.

How does the exam work?

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

First, gel will be applied to your skin to help the transducer make contact. The sonographer will then press the transducer against your skin. As the sound waves bounce off your body's tissues, images are created. These images will appear on a computer monitor for your radiologist to see.

How should I prepare?

- Wear a loose-fitting, 2-piece outfit for the exam. Only your lower abdomen needs to be exposed during the exam.
- Your doctor may ask you to drink a quart of water before your exam to fill your bladder. A full bladder helps some of the internal organs show up more clearly in the images.

How is the exam done?

- You will lie on an exam table. The sonographer will move your clothing away from your lower abdomen.



Talk with your radiologist if you have any questions about your ultrasound exam.

- The sonographer will apply warm gel to your abdomen. This helps the transducer make contact with your skin.
- The sonographer will then press the transducer against your skin and move it over your abdomen.
- If needed, the radiologist may take more images after the sonographer is done.

What will I feel during the exam?

- There is little or no discomfort with ultrasound exams. You may feel some discomfort from having a full bladder.
- You will feel the sonographer apply warm gel to your abdomen and move the transducer over your abdomen.
- You may be asked to roll on your side, or to change positions.
- The exam usually takes less than 45 minutes.

For Women

There may be 2 parts to a pelvic exam for a woman: a *transabdominal* exam and a *transvaginal* exam.

- In a transabdominal exam, you may feel some discomfort due to the pressure of the device on your full bladder.
- In a transvaginal exam, the transducer is placed into the vagina to help your doctor see certain structures more clearly. For this exam, you will need to empty your bladder. A vaginal ultrasound is usually more comfortable than a manual pelvic exam.

Your referring doctor or radiologist will decide if using one method or both is best for your needs.

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 a report to your referring doctor. You will receive your results from the doctor who ordered the test. The radiologist may also 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