



Your maternity ultrasound scan

As part of your antenatal scan care we are offering to scan your baby. If you have any questions please call us on 0118 322 7279.

Why have I been offered a scan?

There are two routine scans, done at about 12 and 20 weeks. These are medical examinations of your baby to confirm your due date and to check for any visible problems in your baby or placenta. To enable the sonographer to undertake this examination it is important that the area is quiet and distractions kept to a minimum.

A sonographer (ultrasound specialist) will explain their findings to you at the end of examination but may be quiet for periods of time while they concentrate on examining your baby.

Most babies are healthy, but sadly some do have problems that could be serious. If you do not wish to know if your baby has an abnormality, it may be best to decide not to have this scan. If you decide to go ahead with the scan we will assume that you wish to know about anything that we find.

How is the scan carried out?

The scan will involve you lying down on a couch, a trained sonographer or doctor will put scan gel on your stomach and then place the scan head onto your stomach. This will give images on the screen that allow examination and measurements of your baby. These can be quite difficult to see clearly, but the scan operator will try to check if all is well.

The nuchal scan (at 12 weeks) is part of the 'screening' for conditions such as Down's syndrome. The second scan (at 20 weeks) is performed to identify major developmental abnormalities in the main body organs. It is possible to identify about half of these with a scan. This means that we cannot guarantee there are no abnormalities even if the scan appears clear.

If the scan suggests that something is not 'quite as expected', you will be told at the time of the scan that there may be a problem. It will be necessary for you to come back to the hospital for a further scan and discussion with a specialist. Most problems that need repeat scanning are not serious and approximately 1 in 7 scans will need to be repeated for one reason or another.

In the table below, there is a list of different types of common congenital abnormality and how likely scanning is to identify each problem. Most of the conditions listed happen in 1 in 500 to 1 in 1000 babies.

Abnormality	Description of problem	Chance of being seen by ultrasound scan
Spina bifida	Open spinal cord	90%
Anencephaly	Absence to the top of the head	98%
Cleft lip or palate	gap or split in the upper lip and/or roof of the mouth	75%
Serious cardiac abnormalities	Major heart defects	50%
Diaphragmatic hernia	Defect in muscle separating chest from tummy	60%

Gastroschisis	Defect in tummy wall	90%
Exomphalos	Defect in the belly button	80%
Bilateral Renal agenesis	Missing or abnormal kidneys	84%
Lethal skeletal dysplasia	Serious limb abnormalities	60%
Cerebral palsy/ Developmental delays/behavioural problems	Not detectable	Never seen
Edward's syndrome (Trisomy 18)	Life limiting chromosome abnormalities or defects	95%
Patau's syndrome (Trisomy 13)		95%

Useful advice on the day of your scan

- You do not need to have a full bladder for a scan.
- A photograph of your baby may be available if the baby is in a good position for it.
- One adult only is allowed to accompany you – we are sorry that no children are permitted inside the scan room, and if you arrive with children we will be unable to scan you unless you have someone with you to watch them.
- All phones, tablets and electronic devices to be turned off whilst you are in the ultrasound room
- It may be possible to determine the sex of your baby during the scan. However, this is not always possible and the accuracy rate is approximately 97% (in 3% of cases the information given will be incorrect).
- If you have any concerns or questions, please don't hesitate to ask a member of staff.
- If you do not have another appointment today you can leave immediately and the result will be forwarded to your consultant; they will be in touch as required.

Reminder:

- No children in the scan room
- No mobile phone use in the scan room
- A chaperone can be arranged upon request

Contact us

The Maternity & Gynaecology Ultrasound Department

Level 2 Maternity Block, Royal Berkshire Hospital, London Road, Reading RG1 5AN

Telephone: **0118 322 7279**

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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Review due: February 2026

Our Maternity Strategy and Vision

'Working together with women, birthing people and families to offer compassionate, supportive care and informed choice; striving for equity and excellence in our maternity service.'

You can read our maternity strategy here

