

Ask the Expert
Arizona Republic

Q: I'm pregnant and recently scheduled my first ultrasound. What is it and what can I expect?

A: Congratulations on your pregnancy! An ultrasound is the use of reflected sound waves that create a picture of body parts such as the abdomen, thyroid, breasts or an unborn baby. A fetal ultrasound can be done as early as five weeks into a pregnancy, and allows doctors to monitor the baby's development. It also allows doctors to see the placement of placenta and the amount of amniotic fluid surrounding the baby.

During your ultrasound, a technologist will place a gel-like substance on your abdomen and use a transducer, a tool that sends ultrasound waves through your body and is reflected off of the baby. From the reflection, a computer will create an image of the baby on a television monitor. The technician will measure the amniotic fluid, head, legs and arms, look at the placement of your placenta and locate your baby's major organs. This ultrasound exposure is not harmful to you or the baby.

If you have an ultrasound between your 18th and 20th weeks of pregnancy, the technologist will be able to identify the baby's gender. Be sure and let your technologist know in advance if you want to know this information or not.

Typically, the technologist will print a few pictures of the baby and may record the ultrasound on a videotape for you to take home. Please be sure to ask if this service is available when you book your appointment. Once the ultrasound is complete, a radiologist will review the images and send them to your obstetrician.



Carmen Utecht, BSRT(R), RDMS, RVT, is the Radiology Supervisor - Special Imaging at Mercy Gilbert Medical Center. For a free doctor referral, please call ResourceLink toll-free at 1.877.728.5414.