Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Your Ultrasound

This information will help you get ready for your ultrasound at MSK. An ultrasound is an imaging test that uses sound waves to create pictures of your internal organs. It can be used to check blood flow or see if a mass is solid or filled with fluid.

About ultrasound

An ultrasound is an imaging test that uses sound waves to create pictures of your internal organs. It can be used to check blood flow or see if a mass is solid or filled with fluid. An ultrasound is also called a sonogram.

Ultrasound does not use radiation and injections (shots) are not usually needed. There are no known harmful side effects of ultrasound.

What to expect

During your ultrasound, you will lie on a bed or stretcher. Your ultrasound technologist will put a gel on the area of your body that's being looked at. Then, they will move a small device called a probe over the surface of your skin.

Getting your results

When your ultrasound is finished, a radiologist will review your ultrasound results. They will send your healthcare provider a written report within 24 hours. Ask your healthcare provider how and when you will get the results from your ultrasound.

Types of ultrasounds

There are different types of ultrasounds. They're named after the area of your body that's being looked at.

How you need to get ready for your ultrasound depends on the type of ultrasound you're having. Follow the instructions below the type of ultrasound you're having. If you have any questions, or aren't sure which type of ultrasound you're having, contact your healthcare provider.

Abdominal ultrasound

An abdominal ultrasound is used to look at the organs in your abdomen (belly). These include your liver, gallbladder, pancreas, spleen, and kidneys.

- Do not eat or drink for 6 hours before your ultrasound. Having an empty stomach makes it easier to see your gallbladder and other internal organs.
- Take your medicine with a sip of water.
- If you take medicine for diabetes (such as insulin), ask the healthcare provider who prescribes it what to do.

Pelvic ultrasound

A pelvic ultrasound is used to look at the organs in your pelvis. These include your ovaries, uterus, cervix, vagina, and bladder.

- Drink 4 to 6 (8-ounce) cups of water 1 hour before your ultrasound.
- Do not urinate (pee) before your ultrasound. Having a full bladder will make it easier to see your uterus and ovaries.
- You may need to have close-up views of the lining of your uterus and your ovaries. If you do, you may have a transvaginal ultrasound after your pelvic ultrasound. For more information, read the "Transvaginal ultrasound" section below.

Combined abdominal and pelvic ultrasound

A combined abdominal and pelvic ultrasound is used to look at the organs in your abdomen and pelvis.

- Do not eat solid food for 6 hours before your ultrasound.
- Drink 4 to 6 (8-ounce) cups of water 1 hour before your ultrasound.
- Do not urinate (pee) before your ultrasound.

Transvaginal ultrasound

A transvaginal (tranz-VA-jih-nul) ultrasound is used to look at the lining of your uterus and your ovaries. You will lie down with your legs raised, like you do during a Pap smear or pelvic exam. Your ultrasound technologist will put the ultrasound probe, which is shaped like a wand, into your vagina.

You do not need to do anything to get ready.

Renal ultrasound

A renal ultrasound is used to look at 1 or both of your kidneys. You do not need to do anything to get ready.

Urinary bladder ultrasound

A urinary bladder ultrasound is used to look at your bladder.

- Drink 4 (8-ounce) cups of water 45 minutes before your ultrasound.
- Do not urinate (pee) before your ultrasound.

Venous ultrasound (Doppler)

A venous ultrasound is used to diagnose blood clots in your legs or arms. You do not need to do anything to get ready.

Breast ultrasound

A breast ultrasound is used to look at the inside of 1 or both of your breasts. You do not need to do anything to get ready.

Scrotal ultrasound

A scrotal ultrasound is used to look at 1 or both of your testicles, epididymis, and scrotum. You do not need to do anything to get ready.

Carotid artery ultrasound

A carotid artery ultrasound is used to look at blood vessels in your neck. These vessels supply blood to your head. You do not need to do anything to get ready.

Thyroid ultrasound

A thyroid ultrasound is used to look at your thyroid gland. Your thyroid is in the front of your neck. You do not need to do anything to get ready.

Ultrasound-guided thyroid biopsy or lymph node biopsy

This type of ultrasound is used to guide a thin needle into your thyroid gland or lymph node. Your radiologist will remove cells and send them to the laboratory to be tested for cancerous or other abnormal cells.

You do not need to do anything to get ready. This test can be done even if you're taking aspirin or other anticoagulants (medicine to thin your blood). If your radiologist will be using a large needle for the biopsy, they will contact you with instructions.

Hysterosonogram

A hysterosonogram (HIS-teh-roh-SAH-noh-gram) is used to look at the lining of your uterus and to check for polyps. Polyps are growths of tissue. You do not need to do anything to get ready.

- You cannot have this test if you have an intrauterine device (IUD).
- You will get sterile saline in your uterus through a small, soft catheter (thin, flexible tube) in your vagina.
- You will get instructions to follow after your procedure. Avoid sexual activity, swimming, and taking baths for 5 days after your procedure.

If you are premenopausal (still get your period):

- You should have the test the first 8 to 12 days after you start your period (menstrual cycle). The best time to have it is right after you stop bleeding.
- Do not have unprotected vaginal sex during the first 12 days of your menstrual cycle.
- If you're pregnant or think you might be pregnant, this test cannot be done.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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