

Pregnancy scans

Scans in pregnancy

Throughout your pregnancy, you'll usually be offered at least two scans; the first is a dating scan at 12 weeks and the second an anomaly scan at 20 weeks to check that your baby is developing healthily. Additional scans may only be advised if your midwife thinks it's wise to keep a closer eye on developments for a particular reason.

The scans described in this article are performed using ultrasound. This involves your sonographer moving a hand-held device over your belly, which transmits a black and white image to a screen. You may be asked to prepare for the scan by drinking a lot of water, as a full bladder helps to push your uterus forward, enabling the sonographer to see more detail. If you're ever unsure what a test is for or have a question about it, your midwife will be able to talk you through the details. Our Careline team of experienced mums and midwives has plenty of advice to offer too. Call them on **08457 623 628** or start a Live Chat on our instant online messaging service.

Early pregnancy scan

Dating scan

Nuchal translucency (NT) scan

Mid-trimester/ 20 week scan

Growth scan

Early pregnancy scan

You may be offered an early scan between 6 and 10 weeks if you have a history of miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy, or if you're experiencing pain or bleeding. The scan will check how far along you are, measure your baby and check their heartbeat. A regular ultrasound is unlikely to offer a clear enough picture at this stage, so it may be performed using a small probe in your vagina.

Dating scan

All NHS hospitals now offer a routine 12 week scan, this is when you'll get the first glimpse of your baby. During the 10 minute scan, your sonographer will take measurements to determine your baby's due date and age. They will check if there is more than one baby, if there are any obvious abnormalities, the condition of your ovaries and your baby's heartbeat.

It can be an exciting and sometimes emotional experience as your baby appears before you. If your hospital offers such a service, you may be able to buy a printout of the image of your baby for a small fee.

It's up to you whether you choose to have your first scan with the NHS, or with a private healthcare provider.

Nuchal translucency (NT) scan

A Nuchal fold scan assesses your baby's risk of having chromosomal abnormalities such as Down's Syndrome. The Nuchal Scan is not yet available in all NHS hospitals, so it is usually performed privately between 11 weeks and up until 13 weeks, 6 days.

During the scan, a measurement is taken of an area at the back of your baby's neck known as the 'nuchal area'. The test also takes into consideration age, weight, height, BMI and blood tests. The result will be a probability rather than a definitive answer, so you may need an amniocentesis test to properly confirm it.

This test may lead to you having to make difficult choices. Your midwife will be able to talk through the reliability of the test and the implications of potential results.

20 week scan

Offered routinely on the NHS to everyone, your 20 week scan allows for a thorough check of your baby's development. Your sonographer will measure your baby's head, abdomen and thigh bone to make sure they are growing and developing well.

Also referred to as the anomaly scan, it lasts around 15-20 minutes. By this stage in your pregnancy you should be able to see your baby's limbs and movements. This can be an exciting moment and one you can treasure with a printout. Your sonographer may also be able to see the sex of your baby so let them know if you'd prefer to find out or not.

They will be checking:

- For cleft palate or any obvious brain problems.
- The alignment and development of your baby's spine.
- The size and shape of your baby's heart.
- Structural defects within your baby's heart.
- Your baby's hands and feet.
- Their stomach, kidneys and bladder.
- The position of the placenta, the umbilical cord and your amniotic fluid levels.

If anything revealed on your 20 week scan needs looking at a little more closely, you'll be offered another scan and will be referred to a specialist.

Growth scan

Growth scans are ultrasound tests that are advised if there is any concern about your baby's growth or development. Your midwife will be able to explain why you are being offered one.

The various scans you're offered during pregnancy can bring up lots of questions and concerns.

Our team of experienced mums, pregnancy advisors and midwives are available to talk you through them. Give them a call on **08457 623 628** or ask them online through Live Chat our confidential instant messaging service.