

Abdominal and pelvic ultrasound scans of your ovaries

This fact sheet will give you information and answer common questions about abdominal and pelvic ultrasound scans of your ovaries.

When will I need a scan of my ovaries?

Symptoms of ovarian cancer include persistent bloating, feeling full quickly and/or loss of appetite, pelvic or abdominal (tummy) pain or needing to wee more often or more urgently than usual. If you have any symptoms associated with ovarian cancer your GP might recommend that you have an ultrasound scan so that your ovaries can be checked for any unusual changes. Ultrasound scans are sometimes ordered alongside or after a CA125 blood test.

If you're concerned that you may have symptoms of ovarian cancer, don't be afraid to ask your GP about having a CA125 blood test and ultrasound scan.

Target Ovarian Cancer has information about symptoms and a separate fact sheet about CA125 blood tests which you can download or order by visiting targetovariancancer.org.uk/guides or by getting in touch with us.



What is an ultrasound scan?

An ultrasound scan creates a picture of the tissues and organs inside your body. A hand-held device called a **transducer** (sometimes referred to as a pad or paddle) uses sound waves to create the image, which will appear on a TV screen. Ultrasound scans are usually carried out by a sonographer or a radiologist and will often take place in the radiology department of your local hospital.

Your appointment letter will contain information about any preparations you need to make before your appointment, so it's important to read the information carefully. For example, you will need to have a full bladder for an abdominal ultrasound.

There are two different types of ultrasound scan:

Abdominal ultrasound

This scan is used to look at the organs in your abdomen and pelvis (from your tummy to the top of your thighs). You'll be asked to come to the appointment with a full bladder. You'll be asked to lie down on an examination couch and to lift your clothes to uncover your tummy. The sonographer will put a clear gel on your skin then move the transducer slowly but firmly across the skin of your tummy. The gel helps the transducer to move smoothly and for a clear picture to appear on the screen. You shouldn't feel any pain during the abdominal ultrasound, but you may feel some discomfort if you have a full bladder.



Ultrasound scans are essential tests to help diagnose or rule out ovarian cancer at the earliest possible opportunity. They are very safe, comfortable, quick and easy."

Anita, who had an ultrasound scan

Pelvic/transvaginal ultrasound

This scan is used to create a clearer picture of your reproductive organs including your uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes and cervix. You'll be given the chance to empty your bladder before the ultrasound. You'll be asked to undress from the waist down and to lie down on an examination couch with your knees bent. The sonographer will insert a small probe into your vagina. The probe will be placed in a protective cover and lubricated well with a warmed jelly before insertion. The sonographer will press down on your tummy and gently move the probe to get a good picture of your pelvic organs. You may feel some discomfort during the pelvic ultrasound, but it shouldn't be painful.

Ultrasound scans are very safe and you'll be able to go home once your scans are complete. You can eat and drink immediately and resume sexual activity as soon as you feel ready.

Why might I need both an abdominal and pelvic ultrasound?

The ovaries are very small, about the size and shape of almonds and they're buried deep within your pelvis surrounded by other organs. Sometimes it can be difficult to see the ovaries on an abdominal ultrasound, and a pelvic ultrasound increases the chance of getting a clear picture that can be examined for unusual changes.

I am on my period. Can I still have a pelvic ultrasound scan?

Yes. It's fine to have a pelvic ultrasound while you have your period. Just let the sonographer know before they start the scan.

When will I get my ultrasound test results?

It can take some time for the results to be ready. Your GP will let you know how long the results should take and will also tell you how to find out the result of your scans. At many GP surgeries you can register for online access to your record and to see your results so ask your surgery for further information if this is how you would like to access them.

The examiner won't be able to give you any results on the day but you can ask them when to expect your results. The ultrasound pictures will be examined by a sonographer/radiologist. They will send a detailed report of their findings and recommendations to your GP. The information in the report will help your GP decide what action to take next. If you don't hear anything within two weeks, give your GP a call.

What do the results mean?

The sonographer/radiologist will be looking for unusual changes to your ovaries including a change in texture, difference in size or visible lumps. Changes of this type can be caused by a number of conditions including cysts, endometriosis and sometimes by ovarian cancer.


The results of the ultrasound scans will help your GP decide what to do next. If any changes are seen which might indicate ovarian cancer, your GP will arrange for an appointment with a gynaecological oncologist (a doctor who specialises in cancer) for further tests and investigations to rule out or confirm ovarian cancer.

If you haven't already had one, your GP might want to do a CA125 blood test. You can read more about this test in our CA125 fact sheet or by visiting targetovariancancer.org.uk/testing

If your scan appears normal but your symptoms continue or get worse then you must contact your GP to let them know and make an appointment within one month.

Find out more

If you need more information on something specific, or just want to chat, our specialist nurses are here. Our support line is open 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Call us on **0808 802 6000**.

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