

## *Greenwich Hospital*

### **How is an Ultrasound Performed During Pregnancy?**

#### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **What is an ultrasound?**

An ultrasound, also called a sonogram, uses high frequency sound waves to create images of your uterus to see your baby and the placenta. The sex of your baby may also be visualized depending upon how many months pregnant you are. At Greenwich Hospital, the ultrasound is performed by an ultrasound technologist.

#### **When is an ultrasound usually done?**

Your doctor may order an ultrasound at various times during your pregnancy to monitor your baby.

#### **In the First Trimester to:**

- Verify you are pregnant and that the fetus is located in your uterus.
- Confirm the number of fetuses.
- Verify your due date.
- Examine the structures of the placenta, your uterus and your pelvis.
- Investigate bleeding and other worrisome signs or symptoms.
- Screen for possible fetal abnormalities.

#### **In the Second Trimester to:**

- Assess fetal growth, amount of amniotic fluid, the placenta and the flow of blood through the placenta.
- Study fetal anatomy and identify possible developmental or fetal abnormalities.
- Determine the length of the cervix.
- As part of another test to evaluate your baby called Amniocentesis (see separate patient fact sheet).

#### **In the Third Trimester to:**

- Evaluate fetal growth and the amount of amniotic fluid.
- Observe the placenta and the flow of blood through the placenta.
- Check the baby's position.
- If you have an accident or injury while pregnant to check the health of your baby.
- As part of another test to evaluate your baby called a Biophysical Profile (see separate patient fact sheet).

## **Are there any specific instructions to follow before the ultrasound?**

- There are no dietary restrictions or preparations prior to the test.
- The nurse will ask you to empty your bladder prior to the test so that you are more comfortable.

## **How is an ultrasound performed?**

There are two ways of doing this test. For the abdominal ultrasound, the technologist places a small amount of gel on a disk and then moves it around on your abdomen. A picture of what is inside your uterus is projected on a computer screen. You may feel some pressure on your abdomen as the ultrasound disk is moved back and forth, but it is not painful.

The second way of doing the ultrasound is through the vagina. This is similar to having a vaginal exam. You lie on your back with your knees apart and the technologist will put the ultrasound wand in your vagina. The wand looks similar to a microphone and provides better pictures because it can be placed closer to the uterus. The pictures of your baby will project on the computer screen as with the abdominal ultrasound.

## **Are there any risks associated with an ultrasound?**

Ultrasound does not use radiation or x-rays. A number of studies have been done to look at the safety of ultrasounds during pregnancy. There is very good data to support the safe use of ultrasounds without risk to your baby.

*Source:* American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists @ [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org) Retrieved March 2006.  
<http://www.ob-ultrasound.net> Retrieved March 2006.  
[www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com) Retrieved March 2006.

*For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education*