

Second trimester anatomy of the abdomen

Patient Information Series – What you should know, what you should ask.

Why does the doctor examine the fetal abdomen in the second trimester?

The ultrasound examination of the baby's belly is part of the routine second-trimester scan. At the second trimester scan, the examiner confirms the presence, normal structure, shape and size of these organs and screens for many kinds of structural abnormalities.

What information is the doctor looking for in this examination?

The abdominal cavity is the largest hollow space in the fetal body containing many internal organs and vessels. The sonographer will examine these organs and blood vessels to see if there are any structural differences and will assess the size of the fetal abdomen as part of the assessment of normal fetal growth.

The baby's stomach is in the upper part of the left-hand side of the belly. The liver fills the upper part of the right-hand side of the belly, and the bowels occupy the middle part. The kidneys which produce urine can be found on the sides of the spine, The ureters connect the kidneys with the urinary bladder, which is located in the bottom of the belly. The gallbladder can be found just below the liver.

The sonographer's role during the examination of the abdomen will be to verify that all these structures are present and in the correct position and that the fetus is at an appropriate size.

How much time will it take to examine the fetal abdomen?

Examination of the fetal abdomen is but one part of a more comprehensive examination of fetal anatomy and structure. The time needed for the anatomic evaluation of the baby's belly specifically depends on the baby's position and the visual circumstances, but usually does not take longer than a few minutes.

What questions should I ask?

- Does the size of the baby's belly suggest that my baby is well grown?
- Is the wall of the baby's belly intact?
- Are all the internal structures present and of the correct position and size?

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