

First-trimester anatomy of the abdomen

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

This information is intended to inform parents about elements of the first-trimester ultrasound examination of the fetal abdomen.

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

The ultrasound examination of the baby's belly is part of the routine first-trimester scan. The examiner confirms the presence, normal structure, shape and size of the abdominal 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.

The baby's stomach is located 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 can be found on the sides of the spine, and they produce urine. The ureters connect the kidneys with the urinary bladder, which is located in the bottom of the belly. The sonographer will verify all these structures are present and are located in the correct position in the fetal abdomen during the examination.

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

Examination of the fetal abdomen is a 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 it does not take longer than a few minutes.

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What other questions should I ask?

- Is the wall of the baby's belly intact?
- Are the stomach and bladder present?
- Are all the internal structures of the correct position and size?

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