

Nuchal Translucency Scan

Patient Information

What is a Nuchal Translucency Scan?

Your doctor has referred you to our practice for a first trimester screening examination known as a nuchal translucency test. This is a two component test which involves a specialised ultrasound called a Nuchal Translucency Scan, along with a blood test. The nuchal translucency test is used to help determine if you are at a higher risk of having a baby with chromosomal abnormalities such as Down syndrome. This is a screening test and will not tell you if your baby definitely has an abnormality, but may help your referring doctor decide if further testing is required.

The Nuchal Translucency Scan is performed between 11 – 14 weeks gestational age. The ultrasound will evaluate the early development of the foetus along with measuring the nuchal translucency thickness, which is a normal collection of fluid under the skin behind the head/neck of the foetus. An increased nuchal translucency thickness has been associated with an increased risk of chromosomal abnormalities.

The second component of the screening is a blood test, which should be performed between 9 - 14 weeks gestational age. The optimal time for both the ultrasound and the blood test is at 12 weeks gestational age. Results from both components are combined to identify pregnancies at increased risk of chromosomal abnormalities. However, a low risk does not guarantee your baby does not have Down syndrome.

What happens during a Nuchal Translucency Scan?

You will be asked to lie on the examination bed and gel will be applied to the lower abdomen. The sonographer will then place a transducer over this area with a sliding and rotating action creating images of the foetus.

The sonographer will carefully assess the thickness of the nuchal translucency. Occasionally, the position of the foetus can make assessment difficult and you may be required to attend a second appointment for further assessment.

Usually the scan will take between 45 – 60 minutes. Sometimes, a transvaginal ultrasound may be recommended to improve the detail of the images. If this is suggested, the procedure will be explained and consent obtained before proceeding. Please see our Transvaginal Ultrasound pamphlet for further information.

We understand that this is a very exciting time for you and your family, however we ask that the number of accompanying people be kept to a minimum. We also recommend that if you have young children, you do not bring them to your appointment. Young children often become restless which can distract the sonographer performing your complex scan.

Please make a follow up appointment with your Doctor to discuss the combined blood and ultrasound results.

What are the risks of a Nuchal Translucency Scan?

There are no known risks to you or your baby from having an ultrasound.