

Abdominal Ultrasound

Definition

Abdominal ultrasound is a type of imaging test. It is used to look at organs in the abdomen, including the liver, gallbladder, spleen, pancreas, and kidneys. The blood vessels that lead to some of these organs, such as the inferior vena cava and aorta, can also be examined with ultrasound.



How the Test is Performed

An ultrasound machine makes images of organs and structures inside the body. The machine sends out high-frequency sound waves that reflect off body structures. A computer receives these waves and uses them to create a picture. Unlike with x-rays or CT scans, this test does not expose you to ionizing radiation.

You will be lying down for the procedure. A clear, water-based conducting gel is applied to the skin over the abdomen. This helps with the transmission of the sound waves. A handheld probe called a transducer is then moved over the abdomen.

You may need to change position so that the health care provider can look at different areas. You may also need to hold your breath for short periods during the exam.

How to Prepare for the Test

No food or drink for 12 hours before the exam.

How the Test will Feel

There is little discomfort. The conducting gel may feel a little cold and wet.

Risks

There is no known risk. You are not exposed to ionizing radiation.

How Long will Test Last

Most of the time, the test takes less than 30 minutes.

Alternative Names Ultrasound - abdomen; Abdominal sonogram; Right upper quadrant sonogram