

Vascular Ultrasound

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains vascular ultrasound exams. It includes how to prepare for the exam, how it works, what you will feel during the exam, and how to get your results.

What is vascular ultrasound?

Ultrasound uses sound waves to make images of the inside of the body. The word *vascular* refers to blood vessels. A vascular ultrasound exam lets us watch how blood flows to your organs and other tissues.

This exam can help doctors find any blockages in your arteries (*stenosis*) and other problems such as blood clots in your veins. This helps your care team diagnosis your health issue and plan the best treatment for you. Vascular ultrasound can also be used to check the result of a blood vessel repair, such as after arterial bypass surgery.

How does the exam work?

First, we will apply gel to your skin over the exam areas. The ultrasound technologist (*sonographer*) will use a hand-held device called a *transducer*. As the technologist presses the transducer against your skin, the device will send and receive sound waves. The sound waves will bounce off your blood vessels, organs, and tissues, and create images. These images will appear on a screen for your interpreting physician to view.

How do I prepare for the exam?

- Wear comfortable, loose- fitting clothes for your exam.
- If the exam will study blood vessels in your belly, you will need to fast for 8 to 12 hours before the exam.
- If the exam will not involve your belly, you do not need to prepare in any special way.



The ultrasound images are sent to a screen for your interpreting physician to view.

How is the exam done?

- If your scan will include your belly or legs, we will ask you to change into a hospital gown.
- We will ask you to lie on an exam table. This table will tilt and move during the exam.
- We will apply a clear gel to the area that will be studied. The gel helps the transducer make contact with the skin.
- The technologist will then press the transducer firmly against your skin and move it over the area. The technologist will watch the pictures on the screen and save them as needed.
- When the exam is over, you may dress in your own clothes, if you had put on a hospital gown. We may ask you to wait while we review the pictures.

What will I feel during the exam?

- Most ultrasound exams are fast, easy, and painless.
- You will feel the technologist spread some gel on your skin and then press the transducer firmly against your body, moving it over the area.
- For *venous* ultrasound exams, such as those on the leg, you will feel a gentle pressure from the transducer. This pressure is needed to help us assess the veins.
- Most exams take about 1 hour. If more than one area needs to be assessed, it may take more time.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

The ultrasound technologist will review the pictures and may give you and the provider who requested the exam the first results. The technologist will then send the pictures and first results to a vascular surgeon. This surgeon will review the exam, finish the report, and send it to the provider who requested the exam.

Your own provider will talk with you about the results of your scan. You and your provider will then decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

You may also read your results on your MyChart page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call 206.598.6206.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

UWMC - Montlake Imaging
Services: 206.598.6200