

Preparing for an Abdominal Ultrasound

If your doctor has ordered an abdominal ultrasound as a diagnostic measure of your medical symptoms, you will need to follow preparatory directions carefully to get a clear, accurate ultrasound for the technician's reading and your doctor's interpretation. Those who have had ultrasounds previously may have an idea of what to expect, although each test is different and may examine differing parts of the abdomen. An ultrasound of this area might check your liver, gall bladder, spleen, kidneys, bladder, urethra, and reproductive organs, among others.

Discuss with your doctor during the consultation what the test is for. Ask him or her about how to prepare, although the nurse may explain this after your examination, or by a set of printed instructions that you will be given upon leaving the office, or that may be mailed to you by the ultrasound department as part of your confirmation and preparatory packet. Read over the written steps carefully to be sure you understand each one. A simple misstep could compromise the test's integrity, or force you to reschedule another time and follow the preparations precisely.

Typically, you may be asked to neither eat nor drink after midnight. Sometimes you may be allowed a sip of water with needed medication, or even an eight-ounce glass of clear liquid. For other abdominal ultrasound examinations, you will have to drink three or four glasses of water anywhere from 1-1/2 to 2 hours before the scheduled test. Don't skimp, and don't overdo it. Drink exactly as much as you should. If this poses any kind of problem for you, call the doctor before the day of the test to explain your concerns, and he or she will advise you how to proceed. If you are drinking a lot of fluid to prepare for the test, be prepared to have a strong urge to urinate. Yet you should try to avoid using the bathroom if the directions indicate this. You will be able to do right after the test, usually in a bathroom located in the test room.

On the day of the test, wear clothing that is easy to remove, especially on the lower half of your body. Tight-fitting jeans, a girdle, or other snug garments may take a little longer to take off and put back on, but it will be up to you whether to wear these or not. Avoid wearing body creams, lotions, or powders, as these could interfere with the ultrasound scanner. You can ask the doctor ahead of time if you really want to wear something like this.

During the ultrasound exam, the technician may take a personal medical history or ask questions about your symptoms. He or she is not permitted to read the test in progress or give you an indication of findings. A specialist will review test results and contact your doctor with his or her impression, and your doctor will relay this information to you, along with a plan of treatment, if one is needed.

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About the Author

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