



Exact Radiology  
CLINICS

# NUCHAL TRANSLUCENCY SCAN

## What is a Nuchal Translucency Scan?

A Nuchal Translucency Scan is performed in the first trimester of pregnancy between 11 weeks 5 days and 13 weeks 6 days, although at Exact Radiology Clinics we recommend that this scan be performed at 12-13 weeks. The scan is used to determine if there is a higher risk of chromosomal anomalies, particularly Down Syndrome (Trisomy 21), but also two other significant syndromes called Trisomy 13 and 18.

Before 11 weeks the baby is too small to properly visualise the anatomy and after 14 weeks the nuchal fluid is reabsorbed and the test cannot be performed. Therefore, it is important to be sure of your dates when booking your scan.

During the nuchal translucency scan we are also able to:

- Confirm your due date
- Diagnose multiple pregnancies
- Diagnose early pregnancy failure
- Do a limited check of the foetal anatomy that is visible at this stage

## Why Have a Nuchal Translucency Scan?

Currently the most accurate non invasive test for detecting Down Syndrome during pregnancy is measurement of the nuchal translucency, a fluid layer at the back of the baby's neck. The fluid is present in all babies during early pregnancy and appears on ultrasound as a black space. Research has shown that increased thickness of the nuchal translucency is associated with an increased risk of Down Syndrome and other chromosomal abnormalities.

## How do I prepare for my Nuchal Translucency Scan?

When you phone to arrange your appointment one of our friendly staff will advise you of the preparation and requirements for this scan.

When you make your appointment please advise our reception staff if it is a multiple pregnancy (twins or triplets) as we will need to allocate more time for your examination. Additionally it is helpful if you remember to bring any previous films from your current pregnancy along with you.

## What should I expect when I have my Nuchal Translucency Scan?

In the majority of patients the baby can be seen well enough with the ultrasound transducer placed on the lower abdomen however, occasionally an internal vaginal (transvaginal) scan may be required to obtain satisfactory images. This internal examination is neither harmful to your pregnancy nor painful.

## How is the risk calculated?

The accredited Sonographer combines the following first trimester information:

### **The background risk based on the mothers age:**

Every woman has a risk of having a baby with Down Syndrome, and this risk increases with age. At 20 years of age the risk at 12 weeks of pregnancy is 1 in 1070 and by the age of 40 it has increased to 1 in 70.



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## **A blood test called 'First Trimester Down Syndrome Screening' (free $\beta$ -hCG and PAPP-A)**

This test is performed after 10 weeks (optimally 2-3 working days prior to your ultrasound). This should not be confused with your antenatal pregnancy blood tests.

This information is entered into a specially designed computer program to calculate the risk, which is expressed as a ratio.

A low risk is a result where the risk is less than 1 in 300 (for example 1 in 1000).

A high risk is a result where the risk is greater than 1 in 300 (for example 1 in 50).

## **How accurate is the Nuchal Translucency Scan?**

The nuchal translucency scan combined with a first trimester blood test can place approximately 90% of babies with Down Syndrome into a high risk category. No screening test is 100% sensitive for detecting Down Syndrome. About one in 20 women will be placed in the high risk category, however the majority of these women will go on to have a healthy baby. A definitive way to determine if your baby has a chromosomal abnormality would be prenatal tests such as Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS) or Amniocentesis, usually undertaken at a specialist foetal medicine centre. However, they are invasive tests that involve introducing a needle into the mother's womb to test the foetal cells and there is a small risk of miscarriage. Most people need to discuss the risks and benefits of these tests with their doctor before choosing to proceed with them. The nuchal translucency result is an important part of this decision-making process.

## **What are the costs of my Nuchal Translucency Scan?**

The cost of a nuchal translucency scan depends on a number of factors that determine whether the scan qualifies for a Medicare rebate. Women aged 35 or older automatically qualify for a rebate but there is a list of clinical conditions which allows the scan to qualify for a Medicare rebate in younger women. The Sonographer will discuss whether you qualify for a rebate on the day of your scan.

When booking an appointment at Exact Radiology Clinics you should ask about the cost.

## **Where to find further information?**

If you would like to know more about nuchal translucency scans please ask the staff at Exact Radiology Clinics. More information can also be found at

**<http://www.fetalmedicine.com/fmc/ultrasound/11-13-weeks-scan/>**

Feel free to discuss any questions or concerns about the ultrasound scan with Exact staff or your referring doctor.

## **Who does my Nuchal Translucency Scan and report?**

The person who operates the scanning equipment is a Sonographer. They are university-trained and accredited with the Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR). The person who views and interprets the ultrasound images is a doctor specialising in Radiology, known as a Radiologist. The Radiologist prepares a report for your Health Care Professional.

## **Things to bring along to my appointment:**

- Previous scans from your pregnancy.
- Medicare Card (as we bulk bill all Medicare services).
- Referral (this is a legal requirement).

*[Last Updated: 17/08/2010]*