

What is an ultrasound scan?

Ultrasound is the use of very high frequency sound waves (not audible to the human ear) to examine the organs of the body. Many sound waves per second are sent from the probe, travel into the body and are sent back to the probe at different according to the tissues it encounters. The machine deciphers these returning signals to create a grey scale image that represents the internal structures, their depth, density and allows us to assess movement in real-time, such as for the heart (*See 'Information for Clients – Echocardiography'*). Ultrasound is not harmful and does not involve the use of radiation, like x-rays and CT scans do, for example and is the type of scan used for pregnancy diagnosis in people.

Why is the procedure being performed?

An abdominal ultrasound allows us to assess the liver, spleen, kidneys, adrenal glands, stomach and small intestine, large intestine, pancreas bladder, reproductive organs (prostate, uterus, ovaries etc.) and lymph nodes. Therefore, there are a number of reasons we might wish to perform an ultrasound of your pet's abdomen. Often, it is because we need to assess which body system is involved in your pet showing non-specific clinical signs, such as vomiting. Or, it might be a more focused examination of the liver due to elevated values on a blood test, for example; of the urinary tract because of recurrent cystitis-signs,; or to investigate weight loss, among many other reasons. By using ultrasound we can identify abnormalities in the appearance of organs and then take samples for laboratory assessment to yield a diagnosis.

What does the procedure involve?

Patients need to be clipped from the back of their ribcage to their pelvis, underneath and along both sides. They are gently held by a nurse on their back or their side, on a specially designed mattress, for the vet to scan. Once all necessary views and measurements from are taken, we move the patient to lay on their opposite side. The scan can take anything from 20-45 minutes (depending on the size of the patient and their cooperation). Usually you will drop your pet to your vet in the morning and the procedure will be carried out during the day.

Does my animal need to be sedated for the procedure?

Although we try to perform the procedure conscious in many patients, it is sometimes necessary to give them mild sedation. The level of sedation required is just sufficient to relax the patient and therefore mild. Usually, this requires the placement of an intravenous cannula, so your animal may also have a shaved patch on the leg(s) for this. Patients will always be given sedation when samples are required as it is very important they are still for this procedure. *Since some patients do require sedation, we ask that they be starved on the morning of the procedure. Please allow food until 10pm the night before, and then remove. Do not withhold water.*

Why are other tests necessary as well?

It is often necessary to perform other tests alongside ultrasound, in order to make an overall assessment of the patient. These may include x-rays, blood tests, urine sample, fluid or tissue sample, depending on the findings. . The requirement for further tests will be discussed with you before or after the appointment, depending on the findings.

When will I get the results of the scan?

The vet performing the scan will endeavour to report results to you the same day. Sometimes, however, your pet may be discharged from hospital for the vet to discuss the results with you at a later point that day, or that week. If a second opinion or specialist input is required, a complete report may not be provided until 1-2 weeks after the scan.

If you have any questions please contact your regular vet.