

Fetal Anomaly Scan (FAS) at 20 to 24 weeks of pregnancy

What is a Fetal Anomaly Scan?

Most pregnancies will end up with a normal and healthy baby. However, a small proportion of women (irrespective of their age) may have a slim chance of delivering a baby with a physical or a mental problem. Some of these abnormalities can be very serious and require very specialized care, including immediate surgery. With the use of high definition ultrasound, most of these physical abnormalities can be diagnosed early. This ultrasound scan done at between 20 to 24 weeks is called the Fetal Anomaly Scan (FAS).

What can the FAS detect?

This ultrasound scan is usually very accurate but unfortunately it cannot guarantee that we can diagnose 100% of all the congenital abnormalities present. The detection rates of some of the abnormalities are shown in the following table below. It is important to note that even if your ultrasound scan is normal, there is a small chance that your baby may still have a problem. The scan can also identify the sex of the baby. Sometimes, this is not feasible due to various reasons such as the position of the baby and the amount of the liquor present. The accuracy of determining the sex is probably about 95% or more. A repeat scan may be needed to reconfirm the finding. Please inform the scan operator early if you do not wish to know the sex of the baby.

Table showing the detection rate of abnormalities in the FAS

Problem	What the problem is	Chance of being seen
Spina bifida	Open spinal cord	90%
Anencephaly	Absence of the top of the head	99%
Hydrocephalus	*Excess fluid within the brain	60%
Major congenital heart problems		25%
Diaphragmatic hernia	A defect in the muscle which separates the chest and abdomen	60%
Exomphalos/gastroschisis	Defects of the abdominal wall	90%
Major kidney problems	Missing or abnormal kidneys	85%
Major limb abnormalities	Missing bones or very short limbs	90%
Cerebral palsy	Spasticity	Never seen
Autism		Never seen
Down syndrome	May be associated with heart and bowel problems	About 40%
* Many cases present late in pregnancy or even after birth		
Ref: RCOG http://www.rcog.org.uk/womens-health/clinical-guidance/ultrasound-screening#app3		

Preparation for the FAS

An appointment will be given for the scan. Please be punctual and bring your FAS form with you to the scan centre. There is no specific preparation required. You are allowed to have your meals prior to the scan (no need to fasting or keep a full bladder).

The scan may take up to 30 minutes to complete and a full report plus a CD of the scan will be given to you. You will be informed of all the findings during the scan. If a problem is detected, a full discussion will be done after the scan or another appointment may be given. Sometimes, a follow-up ultrasound scan may be advised to monitor the problems or to re-confirm the earlier findings.

Disclaimer

This is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. It is important for readers to seek proper medical advice when necessary.

Dr Lee Say Fatt
Sime Darby Medical Centre, Subang Jaya
Nov 2011