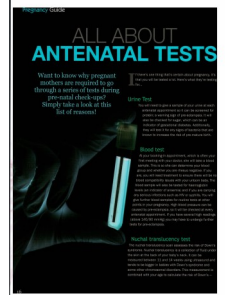


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Pregnancy Guide

ALL ABOUT ANTENATAL TESTS

Want to know why pregnant mothers are required to go through a series of tests during pre-natal check-ups? Simply take a look at this list of reasons!

If there's one thing that's certain about pregnancy, it's that you will be tested a lot. Here's what they're testing for...

Urine Test

You will need to give a sample of your urine at each antenatal appointment so it can be screened for protein; a warning sign of pre-eclampsia. It will also be checked for sugar, which can be an indicator of gestational diabetes. Additionally, they will test it for any signs of bacteria that are known to increase the risk of pre-mature birth.

Blood test

At your booking-in appointment, which is often your first meeting with your doctor, she will take a blood sample. This is so she can determine your blood group and whether you are rhesus negative. If you are, you will need treatment to ensure there will be no blood compatibility issues with your unborn baby. The blood sample will also be tested for haemoglobin levels (an indicator of anaemia) and if you are carrying any serious infections such as HIV or syphilis. You will give further blood samples for routine tests at other points in your pregnancy. High blood pressure can be caused by pre-eclampsia, so it will be checked at every antenatal appointment. If you have several high readings (above 140/90 mmHg) you may have to undergo further tests for pre-eclampsia.

Nuchal translucency test

The nuchal translucency scan assesses the risk of Down's syndrome. Nuchal translucency is a collection of fluid under the skin at the back of your baby's neck. It can be measured between 11 and 14 weeks using ultrasound and tends to be bigger in babies with Down's syndrome and some other chromosomal disorders. This measurement is combined with your age to calculate the risk of Down's —



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one in 300 is considered high. In this case, you will be offered further tests. The nuchal fold test is about 80 per cent accurate. Your hospital may also offer a blood test (measuring the levels of pregnancy-associated plasma protein) which boosts the test's accuracy (85 to 90 per cent). Alternatively you may be offered a blood test in the second trimester, which is called the triple, or Bart's, test. At the moment, hospitals vary in what they offer. Not all offering the nuchal fold test, but you could get testing done privately if you wish.

Listening to the heartbeat

From 16 weeks you can listen to your baby's heartbeat, which many parents find reassuring. However, some expectant mothers find it uncomfortable to have a stethoscope pressed into their bump. Depending on the position of your baby the heartbeat can be found at different areas of your abdomen, and this may cause you stress and anxiety.

Dating scan

This scan is usually given between 10 and 14 weeks, and lasts around 20 to 30 minutes. The point is to check your baby's growth, based on the measurement from the top of the head to its bottom, and the diameter of the head, so that a due date can be calculated. Cold gel is rubbed onto your lower belly, and the transducer is pressed lightly against your skin and then moved around to look at your baby so the measurements can be taken. The scan also checks the baby's heartbeat and to see if you are carrying twins or triplets. Major abnormalities may be spotted, too.




Doppler scan

It's usual to see your baby moving and stretching during scans. If there are any worries about your baby's movements, a Doppler scan is carried out to check that blood is flowing to the placenta properly and to ensure that your baby's heart is beating at a normal rate.

Anomaly scan

Most hospitals offer a detailed ultrasound scan at about 20 weeks to check whether your baby is developing properly or not. At this stage your baby has well-developed limbs and all of his major organs are in place, so the doctor can examine the head, spine, heart, stomach, kidneys, hands and feet for abnormalities. She will also check if your placenta is low-lying, in which case you will need monitoring as it may cause bleeding in later pregnancy. You may be able to discover if you are having a boy or a girl, too.

4D scan

Between 24 and 32 weeks you can choose to pay for a private 4D scan, which allows you to see clear moving images and videos of your baby. There is no medical reason for this scan - it's just for fun! If you do decide to go ahead with one, check that the company has a referral policy in case anything unusual is uncovered. It is a lengthy scan and often allows you to see your baby move into a range of positions. 



You will give further blood samples for routine tests at other points in your pregnancy.