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Breast Ultrasound

Imaging Department

Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email pals@asph.nhs.uk. If you remain concerned, PALS can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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What is an Ultrasound Scan of the breast?

Ultrasound imaging uses high frequency sound waves to produce a picture of the internal structures of the breast. A small hand-held probe is pressed gently against the skin surface. It both generates inaudible sound waves and detects any echoes reflected back off the surfaces and tissue boundaries within the breast. From these reflected sound waves the computer generates a real time picture which is displayed on the monitor. The probe is moved across the skin to view the breast from different angles.

Breast ultrasound is used to help clarify breast abnormalities felt by a doctor during a physical examination and to characterize potential abnormalities identified on mammography.

Ultrasound is particularly good at determining if a lump is solid (which may be a non-cancerous lump or a cancerous tumour) or fluid-filled (such as a benign cyst).

Ultrasound is also used to guide aspiration or biopsy of a lump.

Preparing for breast ultrasound

There is no specific preparation necessary prior to a breast ultrasound. If you have had recent mammograms elsewhere it would be useful to bring them with you.

What does a breast ultrasound entail?

Before entering the ultrasound room you will be asked to strip from the waist up and put on a gown.

You will be scanned by a radiologist (an x-ray doctor). The radiologist will ask you about your breast problem. You will be asked to take off your gown and lie on the couch. The radiologist will then examine your breasts to locate any lumps. There will be a chaperone present in the room during your examination.

A gel will be applied to your skin over the area of the breast to be scanned. The gel allows the probe to pass easily over the skin and helps to produce clearer pictures. The lights in the room will be dimmed to allow the images on the screen to be seen more clearly.

The radiologist will slowly move the probe across your breast and view the images on the screen. Selected images will be made so that they can be viewed later.

At the end of the scan, the gel will be wiped off and you will be free to get dressed.

How long will it take?

The actual scan takes 5-10 minutes.

What happens after the breast ultrasound?

The radiologist will review the images taken and send a report to your referring doctor. You will need to make an appointment with the referring doctor to discuss the results.

If an abnormality is seen during the ultrasound scan it may be necessary to perform a fine needle aspiration or core biopsy to evaluate the abnormality further. The radiologist will discuss this with you at the end of the scan.

Will the ultrasound hurt?

No, ultrasound is a painless examination.

What are the risks of having an ultrasound?

There are no known risks. There is no radiation involved.