

Intestinal ultrasound for IBD

This information sheet is for people who want to learn about intestinal ultrasound for inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) monitoring and diagnosis.

Key points

- Intestinal ultrasound is a non-invasive way to diagnose and monitor Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.
- It uses sound waves to create clear, detailed images of the small and large intestines, showing where inflammation or complications are occurring.
- Intestinal ultrasound is quick, pain-free, and offers real-time monitoring of your disease. This allows you and your specialist to make treatment decisions faster.

What is intestinal ultrasound for IBD?

Intestinal ultrasound is a simple, painless test. It uses sound waves to create accurate, detailed images of the small and large intestines. The sound waves bounce off the intestines to create clear images that show the thickness of the bowel wall (thicker bowel wall may mean inflammation) and blood flow (increased blood flow may mean inflammation). This helps your doctor to understand where disease is occurring and its severity. Intestinal ultrasound can also find any complications, like narrow areas in the intestines (strictures), unusual connections between the intestines and other organs (fistulas), and pockets of infected fluid (abscesses).

Intestinal ultrasound can be used to diagnose IBD or check if it has come back after some time without symptoms. It can also be used to track how well treatments like medications are working. Intestinal ultrasound is often used with other tests like blood tests, stool tests, and endoscopy (a camera that looks inside the intestines).

What does getting an intestinal ultrasound involve?

Your doctor will recommend an intestinal ultrasound and provide you with relevant information. Intestinal ultrasound is sometimes done during your medical consultation by a qualified doctor, or you may be sent to another specialist.

You don't need any bowel preparation before an intestinal ultrasound. You can eat and drink as normal beforehand, with no fasting. During your appointment, you'll need to lift your shirt and expose your abdomen so that the ultrasound can view the correct area. The specialist will put some gel on your stomach. Then, they will move the probe around for about 10-30 minutes to see different parts of your intestines.

You'll discuss the results with your specialist either during the ultrasound appointment or at your next appointment if you had the ultrasound at a different clinic. The results will help you and your specialist decide on the next steps for managing your condition.

How much does an intestinal ultrasound cost?

Most intestinal ultrasound services are done in the public sector. You will not pay a gap fee as Medicare covers the service. If your intestinal ultrasound is performed in the private sector, you may be charged a fee. There is currently no private health insurance rebate for intestinal ultrasound so ask your specialist for an exact price before you get the ultrasound.

Do intestinal ultrasounds replace the need for a colonoscopy?

Intestinal ultrasounds do not completely replace the need for a colonoscopy. In some people, monitoring inflammation with an intestinal ultrasound and a stool test (to measure faecal calprotectin) can reduce the frequency of colonoscopies. The tests and procedures you have are based on your individual needs.

What are the benefits and risks of intestinal ultrasound?

There are many benefits of intestinal ultrasound:

- Safe and suitable for both kids and adults.
- Painless with no needles or medicines and no bowel preparation beforehand.
- Can be used to track IBD and check if treatments are working. This makes it easy to adjust treatment quickly if needed.

Intestinal ultrasound is safe without major risks or side effects. You might feel mild pressure or discomfort from the ultrasound probe on your stomach. For some people, disease may not show on the ultrasound, and you may need further tests.

For help or information

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