

# **Ultrasound in pregnancy: A cultural phenomenon?**



By [ElvisHuang](#)

Years ago, ultrasound in pregnancy was unknown. Today, it's a routine part of prenatal care. When I first started working as a labor and delivery nurse, fetal ultrasounds didn't exist. Just imagine — no pictures of your developing baby, and no way to determine your baby's sex until birth. Twins were sometimes a surprise in the delivery room!

Today, of course, the situation is quite different. Ultrasound in pregnancy is considered a normal part of prenatal care. Sometimes ultrasound offers reassurance, such as a strong heartbeat or evidence of normal growth and development. You might enjoy the added benefit of learning your baby's sex ahead of time. In other cases ultrasound detects the heartbreaking loss of pregnancy or the possible presence of a birth defect.

The availability of commercial ultrasound packages takes ultrasound in pregnancy to a new level. Businesses offering fetal ultrasounds for keepsake photos or videos — some available in 3D — have popped up in malls and shopping centers across the country. As tempting as it might be to seek this sort of memento, remember that ultrasound isn't quite like snapping a photo. It's a medical procedure and isn't recommended solely for fun. If you decide to proceed with commercial ultrasound, do your homework. Check on training and credentials for the staff members. Ask what happens if the technician detects an abnormality on the ultrasound. Make sure you're comfortable with any disclaimers or legal waivers.

It's also important to remember that ultrasound in pregnancy is fallible. Sometimes birth defects are missed — or incorrectly identified — with ultrasound. Sometimes a baby's sex is obvious, and sometimes a bit of guesswork or uncertainty is involved.

Still, ultrasound in pregnancy is woven into our culture. Do you suppose there will ever be a fetal Facebook where in utero babies will send out friend requests along with their ultrasound pictures?

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