

Echogenic bowel

Who is this leaflet for?

As you know, an ultrasound scan of your baby has shown the baby's bowel has an unusual appearance known as 'echogenic' or 'bright' bowel.

What is this?

The bowel is described as 'echogenic' when it reflects more ultrasound than normal. This causes it to appear whiter or brighter on the ultrasound screen than other abdominal organs.

Why does it occur?

We often do not find a reason why a baby has bowel that is brighter than normal and the baby has no problems before or after birth.

- Sometimes it may be due to bleeding within the womb in early pregnancy. This bleeding may not be noticed by the mother, but the baby may swallow some of the blood, which gives it a 'bright' appearance on scan. This causes no problems for the baby.
- In some cases, it may be due to an infection in the mother that has crossed the placenta to the baby. A blood test can be performed to check for this.
- It may also be due to a condition called Cystic Fibrosis, which is a genetic disease. A baby can only be affected if both parents are carriers of the Cystic Fibrosis gene and we can perform a blood test on each parent to check for this. In this situation a further test (amniocentesis) can be performed to check the baby.
- A small proportion of cases of echogenic bowel may be associated with an underlying chromosome problem in the baby. We will discuss this with you and you may be offered an amniocentesis to check your baby's chromosomes.

- Echogenic bowel can be associated with poor fetal growth due to the placenta (afterbirth) not working properly. Your baby's size and blood flow measurements to the placenta will be checked.

Will my baby have other abnormalities?

We will carry out a detailed ultrasound scan of your baby, and look very carefully for other abnormalities that may be detected by scan. It is not however possible to see all problems with which your baby may be born.

What happens now?

Following your scan, we will discuss the various choices and tests with you. If you choose to have further tests performed, we will inform you of the results as soon as we have them. If one of the tests identifies a problem, we will fully discuss the possible implications with you.

In many cases, no underlying cause is found for the echogenic bowel. However, we will arrange for further scans to check your baby's growth later in the pregnancy.

Any questions?

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Fetal Medicine Unit
Royal Cornwall Hospital

Tel: 01872 252682

Your GP, midwife or obstetrician may also be able to give you more information.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690