

PRENATAL ULTRASOUND FINDINGS

Single Umbilical Artery (SUA)

What is a single umbilical artery (SUA)?

An SUA is a common variation of the umbilical cord with 2 blood vessels instead of the usual 3.

During a second trimester ultrasound, the umbilical cord is routinely examined. The umbilical cord connects the developing baby to the placenta. Usually there are 3 blood vessels in the umbilical cord: 1 vein and 2 arteries. The vein carries oxygen and nutrients from the placenta to the baby. The arteries carry blood from the baby back to the placenta. Sometimes there are only two blood vessels, 1 vein and 1 artery. This ultrasound finding is also called a two-vessel cord.

An SUA is seen in up to 1 in 100 pregnancies (1%) when there is one baby. It happens in up to 5 in 100 pregnancies with twins (5%).

How does an SUA happen?

No one knows why this happens in some babies and not others. It can happen when the umbilical artery does not split into two separate arteries. The arteries usually split in the first month of pregnancy. It could also happen when one artery shuts down early in the pregnancy and stops working.

Will an SUA go away?

An SUA is not expected to go away before delivery. The blood vessels in the umbilical cord form very early. That means a “missing” artery will not grow back later in pregnancy.

Are any additional tests needed?

When an SUA is seen, it is important to check for other ultrasound findings. A baby that has no other ultrasound findings will usually be healthy at birth. Your prenatal care provider will also watch the baby's growth.

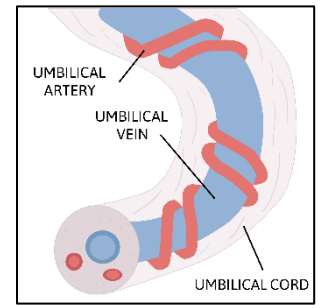
- **Detailed (level 2) ultrasound:** A detailed ultrasound is done to look more closely at the baby's body and organs, but it is not always needed. This type of ultrasound may be recommended when there are other ultrasound findings or concerns about the pregnancy.
- **Third trimester ultrasound:** An ultrasound may be done in the third trimester if there are concerns about the baby's growth.

What if the follow-up tests are reassuring?

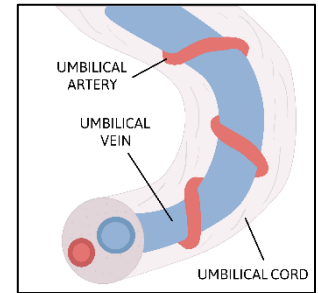
When the follow-up tests are reassuring, you can continue with routine prenatal care. Most babies with a single artery grow and develop normally during pregnancy. The umbilical cord vessels close off after delivery, so this has no effect on the baby after birth.

Where can I get more information?

You can speak with your OB provider if you have questions about this ultrasound finding.



Usual (3 vessels)



Single Umbilical Artery (2 vessels)