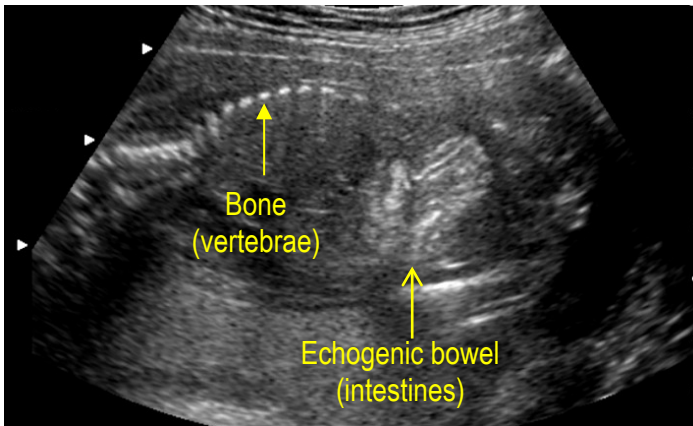


PRENATAL ULTRASOUND FINDINGS

Echogenic Bowel



Ultrasound image of the fetal body

What is echogenic bowel?

Echogenic bowel is a bright area seen in a developing baby's intestine. This is found in 1% to 2% of pregnancies.

Ultrasound uses sound waves to safely look at your baby. Ultrasound images look brighter when sound waves connect with solid or dense areas of the body (like bone). Echogenic bowel simply means that the baby's bowel (intestines or gut) looks brighter than usual on the ultrasound. The bowel is called "echogenic" when it looks as bright as the baby's bones.

What does it mean for my baby?

Most babies with echogenic bowel are born healthy. This is often just part of normal development. However, some health problems are more likely to be found in a baby with echogenic bowel.

Health problems seen with echogenic bowel

- Chromosome conditions
- Cystic fibrosis
- Fetal infection
- Intestinal blockage
- Poor fetal growth

What makes the bowel look bright?

The muscles of the fetal bowel start to move at about 10 weeks in pregnancy. At that time, the fetus begins to swallow amniotic fluid and the fluid moves through the bowel.

Different things can make the baby's bowel look bright on ultrasound.

- **Slowed or blocked bowel movement:** The bowel muscles may move slower than usual or start moving later than 10 weeks. There could be a part of the bowel that is blocked. Normal bowel contents can build-up when movement is slowed or blocked. This build-up looks bright on ultrasound
- **Blood in the amniotic fluid:** Bleeding during pregnancy can leak blood into the fluid around the baby. This sometimes happens when a small part of the placenta breaks away from the uterus. It is not harmful for a baby to swallow fluid with blood in it. However, blood cells in the bowel look bright on ultrasound.

Does an echogenic bowel go away?

Echogenic bowel sometimes goes away, but it might not. There can still be a normal outcome even if the echogenic bowel does not go away.

What is the chance for a health problem?

The chance for a health problem varies and depends on you and your pregnancy history. Each pregnancy is unique. The chance is lower if echogenic bowel is the only ultrasound finding.

Chance for health problems with echogenic bowel		What can influence the chance?
Chromosome condition (like Down syndrome)	1% to 10%	Higher chance with other ultrasound findings and older maternal age Lower chance if you had a normal result from a prenatal screening test
Cystic fibrosis	1% to 4%	Lower chance if you had normal cystic fibrosis carrier testing
Fetal Infection	1% to 5%	Higher chance with other ultrasound findings
Intestinal blockage	1%	Higher chance if the bowel looks swollen or enlarged
Poor fetal growth or fetal loss	10% to 20%	Higher chance when prenatal screening markers suggest a chance for pregnancy complications

Will I be offered more testing?

Yes. Tests are offered to help find the reason for the echogenic bowel. It is your choice to decide whether or not to have more testing. The type of testing depends on your medical history, your family history, and your ultrasound findings. You may be offered some or all of the following tests:

- **Maternal blood tests:** Blood tests done on you can tell you about the chance for some health problems in the baby. You may have already had some testing as part of your early prenatal care. Blood tests do not usually give a final answer about the baby's health. More testing is needed to diagnose cystic fibrosis, a chromosome condition, or an infection in the baby.
- **Amniocentesis:** This procedure is done by using a thin needle to remove a small amount of the fluid around the baby. The fluid is tested for chromosome conditions, prenatal infections, and cystic fibrosis, as needed. There is a small chance for miscarriage with this test.
- **Ultrasound:** A level 2 ultrasound carefully looks at the baby for other ultrasound findings. Ultrasound is able to find some birth defects and can watch the baby's growth during pregnancy. You may be offered ultrasounds later in pregnancy if there are concerns about growth or an intestinal blockage.

What if all the tests are reassuring?

If all of the tests are reassuring, you can continue with routine prenatal care. You will most likely have a healthy baby. However, it is not possible to identify all problems during pregnancy.

Where can I get more information?

Talk with a genetic counselor for more information.

Kaiser Genetics Departments:

Fresno/Modesto (559) 324-5330
 Oakland (510) 752-6298
 Sacramento (916) 614-4075
 San Francisco (415) 833-2998
 San Jose (408) 972-3300

References:

UpToDate: Fetal echogenic bowel (2021)
 D'Amico et al. Outcome of fetal echogenic bowel: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Prenat Diagn. 2021