Prenatal Ultrasound

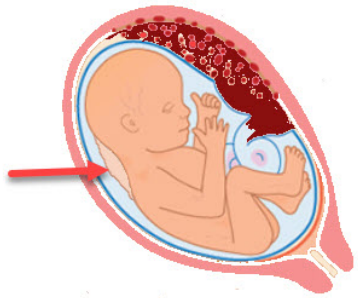
Increased Nuchal Fold (2nd trimester)

What is an increased (thick) nuchal fold?

The nuchal fold is a normal fold of skin at the back of a baby's neck. This can be measured between 15 to 22 weeks in pregnancy as part of a routine prenatal ultrasound.

Follow-up is offered when the nuchal fold is thick (6 mm or more). Many healthy babies have thick nuchal folds. However, there is a higher chance for Down syndrome or other chromosome conditions when the nuchal fold is thick. There may also be a higher chance for rare genetic conditions.

Thick nuchal fold at 20 weeks



Does a thick nuchal fold mean the baby has a problem?

Usually not. There are some common reasons for a thick nuchal fold in healthy babies.

- **Position of the baby** – The position of a baby's head can sometimes make the nuchal fold look thicker than it really is.
- **Inaccurate measurement** – The nuchal fold can sometimes be hard to measure exactly.
- **Normal differences** – The normal size of the nuchal fold is different for each baby. Male babies may have slightly thicker nuchal folds than female babies. The size also gets larger as a baby gets bigger.

What follow-up testing is offered when the nuchal fold is thick?

The follow-up testing you are offered depends on which tests have already been done.

Level 2 (targeted) ultrasound – You may be offered another ultrasound to re-measure the nuchal fold and look for signs of a chromosome condition. A repeat measurement may find that the nuchal fold is normal.

Screening for chromosome conditions: You may have already had a blood test to check for common chromosome conditions, like Down syndrome. If you have not had a screening test, this may be offered to you. Screening tests will find most babies with Down syndrome, but not all.

- California State Screening (serum screening or sequential integrated screening) – Sometimes this test also includes an early ultrasound (NT ultrasound). State Screening detects about 80% to 95% of babies with Down syndrome. Your result includes an estimate of your risk for Down syndrome.
- Non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) – NIPT detects 99% of babies with Down syndrome. If your result was normal, it is very unlikely for the baby to have Down syndrome.

Amniocentesis – Amniocentesis can show if a developing baby has Down syndrome or another common chromosome problem. You may choose this test if you want to know for sure about these type of conditions. The sample may also be tested for rare genetic conditions. There is a small risk for miscarriage from the procedures (about 1 in 900 risk).

What if follow-up tests are reassuring?

When follow-up tests are normal, you will most likely have a healthy baby.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional.

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