



Your vet has booked your pet for an ultrasound examination and consultation with VetArtis, the veterinary company of [Dr Sarah Keir](#), who visits practices in the local area providing vets with additional services and experience they may not have in-house. Your normal vet and the practice remain the vets in charge of your pet and the vet you normally see will continue to work in collaboration with you to make decisions and plan for your pets' ongoing investigations and treatment.

VetArtis aims to provide a safe, stress-free experience for your pet while obtaining valuable diagnostics. We work in partnership with your usual veterinary surgeon to develop an effective diagnostics and treatment plan with options for you to discuss with your vet.

What is an ultrasound scan?

An ultrasound examination ('scan') uses sound waves that are above the audible range of the human ear to construct pictures, like scans of unborn babies in humans. A small hand-held probe is held against the skin surface. This generates the sound waves and these reflect back off the different surfaces within the body to construct an image that is viewed on a screen. The vet performing the ultrasound examination will then move the sensor around to make sure the entire organ is examined. Pictures can be saved and recorded for further study or sending externally for a second opinion.

The ultrasound scan is safe, non-invasive and is not painful. Your pet just needs to lie still to allow the examination to proceed.

Ultrasound scans are most often used to examine the soft tissues of the body, primarily the heart and organs in the tummy. As with other diagnostic procedures, the ultrasound examination rarely gives the vet all the information of your pet's diseases and must be taken in context with other tests and examinations.

What else can ultrasound be used for?

Ultrasound examinations allow us to see into your pet without exploratory surgery and it gives information on organ size and structure. It does not let us know what is happening at a cellular level which is why samples such as biopsies are often used in addition to the scan. These biopsies are often done with the help of ultrasound-guidance, so the correct structures are biopsied while also minimising risks.

In some cases repeating ultrasound scans over time can be used to monitor progress of a condition.



An ultrasound examination can also give important information on heart function and of course, scans can be performed for pregnancy diagnosis.

Why does my pet need to be sedated?

Sedation is sometimes needed for an ultrasound examination. This is often because the animal is often scared and stressed; sedation makes the procedure less distressing to them and allows us to get the best information out of the scan as they won't be tense or panting. The temperament of your pet and any medical conditions will be taken into consideration when deciding this. For the majority of patients, the risks of the sedation are actually less than the stress of the examination without sedation and reduce the change of missing small and subtle changes in a panting or tense patient.

For emergency, heart and pregnancy scans, sedation is rarely required.

Why does my pet's fur need to be clipped?

The ultrasound waves don't pass-through air and as hair traps a lot of air it must be removed to allow the probe to make contact with the skin. A non-toxic water-based gel helps with this too – this may leave a sticky feeling to your pet's skin. In all cases the ultrasound images will be of better quality and be more useful if the area to be examined is clipped.

We have to remember that animals don't mind what they look like and fur grows back (excepting some health conditions)!

Why has the vet recommended that samples are taken?

Although ultrasound is very good for looking inside the body, many diseases can have a similar appearance. Obtaining a small sample of tissue by either using a small needle or a larger (core) needle will help the vet to make a much better diagnosis. However, even with these samples, a definitive, 100% diagnosis is not guaranteed – there are few 100% guarantees when we are dealing with bodies and nature.

What are the risks with taking samples?

A fine needle aspirate has a very small risk of any problems. The biggest risk from obtaining a tissue sample via a core needle is internal bleeding, but this is very rare. Heavy sedation or a light general anaesthetic is required for a core needle sample. After taking ultrasound guided biopsies, your pet will need to stay at the practice for at least 3 hours afterwards so they can be monitored for any bleeding.



Costs

Although the initial cost of a scan may seem high, please bear in mind the high cost of the equipment and the years of specialist training and experience needed in order to interpret the images. An ultrasound scan is an invaluable, non-invasive and safe diagnostic tool to allow us to help you decide what is the best treatment for your pet. Costs are likely to be much lower than a referral to a Specialist in a hospital, allowing more pets to access advanced care affordably.

What will happen on the day?

In advance of the day your vet will book a time for you to come to the practice. On arrival you will be asked to sign a consent form, and the practice will check your telephone number and that your pet has been starved. Your pet will be admitted to its bed and when the ultrasound examination is ready then your pet will be sedated and placed on their back or side on some soft bedding. The fur will be clipped over the area/s requiring to be examined. The examination may take up to an hour. If your pet has had sedation or samples taken, it will stay in the practice for a time to be monitored until it is deemed safe to go home.

Can I stay with my pet?

Many owners believe their pet will be less stressed and more co-operative if they are with them, however it is often the opposite. It is also important to avoid interruptions and possible distractions to allow personnel to fully concentrate during the procedure. Therefore, the examination can be performed more efficiently and accurately when only trained staff are with your pet.