

4D Ultrasound Offers First Glimpse of Baby

By Kevin Fleishman, M.D.

Q: My husband and I are expecting our first child and have been told that we can get a picture of the baby still in the womb through 4D Ultrasound. What is this?

A: Yes, you can get a first glimpse of your baby – before birth – through 3D and 4D Ultrasound. Ultrasound scanning is a screening technique in which very high frequency sound waves are passed into the body, and the reflected echoes are detected and analyzed to build a picture of a fetus in the uterus.

Some local obstetricians now have the equipment that will allow you to see your baby develop throughout your pregnancy. There also are independent ultrasound providers in the area. Several packages are offered to parents, including photos, live video clips, and DVDs of the entire experience.

It is amazing to see so much detail with the 4D scan and see this little person behaving in a way we only usually see when the baby is born. Mothers and fathers love to see their baby sucking its thumb or toes, smiling and wriggling around. Moms also tend to bond with their babies more easily as they feel their baby moving, and I have found fathers get very emotional as they ‘meet their baby’ for the first time. We have had many a tear in the scan room!

Q: Is it safe?

A: Extensive clinical studies during the past 30 years found that ultrasound has not been shown to cause any harm to mother or baby.

Q: What will determine the quality of the images?

A: The most important factor is the position of the baby. 3D/4D ultrasound depends on the baby’s position, size and movement. Other critical factors are the amount of amniotic fluid and maternal tissue, and fetal activity. So we cannot

guarantee image quality due to those factors. We always include a 2D ultrasound with 3D as they work together to show a full picture of the baby's features and activity. Heartbeat, real-time fetal activity, hair and gender are ideal for viewing with 2D imaging.

Q: When is a good time for a 3D/4D ultrasound?

A: We recommend that mothers schedule it between the 26th and 31st week of pregnancy, if you're planning only one ultrasound session. We generally can get the cutest facial images at that time. However, we have obtained spectacular images as early as 19 weeks and as late as 36 weeks. Many women choose to come in for multiple sessions to see their baby at different stages.

In addition to determining the gender of the baby, this is a great way to bring friends and family together to experience the joy of seeing your baby for the first time.

Kevin Fleishman, M.D., is a board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist with Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida.