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# ECHOGENIC BOWEL

## WHAT IS A ECHOGENIC BOWEL?

An echogenic bowel is when a baby's bowel (the intestines) looks bright white on ultrasound. Typically, the bowel and most other organs appear in shades of grey on ultrasound. Things that appear white on ultrasound are more solid or dense, like bones. Thus, this finding is also called "as bright as bone" or "hyperechoic." About 1 in 60 (1.8%) to 1 in 500 (0.2%) prenatal ultrasounds reveal echogenic bowel, and that most cases are normal variation. **This finding is not a birth defect.**

## HOW COMMON IS THIS FINDING?

**1-2%** of all pregnancies will have this ultrasound finding

## WHAT CAUSES ECHOGENIC BOWEL AND WHAT ARE OTHER TESTS I CAN CONSIDER?

Though echogenic bowel can be a normal finding on ultrasound with no impact to the pregnancy, there are several medical conditions that can also be associated with this finding.

**Blockage in the bowel:** In this case, there are sometimes other signs seen on ultrasound, such as extra amniotic fluid around the baby, extra fluid in the baby's belly, or dilated loops of bowel. Many of these signs may not be seen until late in pregnancy. When a baby has a blockage or obstruction of the bowel, surgery may be needed after delivery.

**Cystic fibrosis**: Cystic fibrosis (CF) is a hereditary disease that affects the lungs and bowels so that thick mucus accumulates in those organ systems and leads to various medical concerns. CF occurs when an individual gets two non-working genetic instructions (or genes) —one from the egg and one from the sperm. Individuals with only one non-working gene copy are called carriers. Since carriers only have one non-working gene, they typically don't have CF symptoms. Carrier screening is a blood test that can screen one or both biological parents to determine if they have a non-working gene. Testing the baby for CF can also occur during pregnancy via chorionic villus sampling (CVS) or amniocentesis. Alternatively, testing for CF can be completed after delivery.

**Chromosome condition:** Humans typically have 46 chromosomes which tell our body how to grow and develop. Extra or missing chromosomes can impact an individual's growth and development and can cause birth defects, intellectual disabilities, and other health concerns. Down syndrome is caused by an extra chromosome 21 and is associated with intellectual disabilities and other health concerns. Sometimes, babies with Down syndrome can have an echogenic bowel. Several screening tests and diagnostic procedures can determine the baby's chance for Down syndrome. If you already had prenatal screening, your healthcare team may be able to discuss your personal risk.

**Fetal infection:** Though the pregnant person may not have any signs or symptoms, certain infections can affect a developing baby differently and can cause the baby's bowels to be inflamed, which can show up as bright areas on ultrasound. Though testing isn't possible for all infections, blood testing for more common infections (such as cytomegalovirus and toxoplasmosis) is available and can evaluate if there has been a recent infection in the pregnant person. Amniocentesis can determine whether an infection reached the baby.

## WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFO?

If you have additional questions or concerns about this ultrasound finding, please don't hesitate to contact your genetic counselor and/or prenatal care provider. Your healthcare team is here to help you during pregnancy.

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