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Common prenatal tests

If your doctor suggests certain prenatal tests, don't be afraid to ask questions. Learning about the test, why your doctor is suggesting it for you and what the test results could mean can help you cope with any worries or fears you might have. Keep in mind that screening tests don't diagnose problems, they evaluate risk. So, if a screening test comes back abnormal, this doesn't mean there is a problem with your baby, more information is needed. Your doctor can explain what test results mean and possible next steps.

Here are a few tests your doctor may request. This isn't an all-inclusive list.

TEST	WHAT IT IS	HOW IT IS DONE
First trimester screen	A screening test done at 11 to 14 weeks to detect higher risk of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chromosomal disorders, including down syndrome • Other problems, such as heart defects It can also reveal multiple births.	A blood test measures the levels of certain substances in the mother's blood. An ultrasound measures the thickness of the baby's neck. The combined information with the mother's age help doctors determine risk to the fetus.
Urine test	A urine sample can look for signs of health problems, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urinary tract infection • Diabetes • Preeclampsia If your doctor suspects a problem, the sample might be sent to a lab for more testing.	Testing strips are placed in a urine sample that looks for certain substances. The sample can also be looked at under a microscope.
Chorionic villus (KOR-ee-ON-ihk Vil-uhss) sampling	A test done at 10 to 13 weeks to diagnose certain birth defects, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chromosomal disorders • Genetic disorders CVS may be suggested for couples at higher risk for genetic disorders.	A needle removes a small sample of cells from the placenta to be tested.
Maternal serum screen (also called Quad screen, Triple test, Triple screen, Multiple marker screen or AFP)	A screening test done at 15 to 20 weeks to detect higher risk of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chromosomal disorders • Neural tube defects 	Blood is drawn to measure the levels of certain substances in the mother's blood.
Nonstress test	This test is performed after 28 weeks to monitor the baby's health. It can show signs of fetal distress, such as the baby not getting enough oxygen.	A belt is placed around the mother's belly to measure the baby's heart rate in response to its own movements.
Ultrasound exam	An ultrasound exam can be performed at any point during the pregnancy. Ultrasound exams are not routine. It is also used as part of the first trimester screen and biophysical profile.	Ultrasound uses sound waves to create a "picture" of the baby on a monitor. A special tool is moved over your abdomen that allows the doctor to view the baby on a monitor.

Source: Office on Women's Health