

**American College of Radiology
ACR Appropriateness Criteria®**

Clinical Condition: Growth Disturbances — Risk of Intrauterine Growth Restriction

Variant 1: Risk of IUGR initial evaluation.

Radiologic Procedure	Rating	Comments	RRL*
US pregnant uterus	9	Assessment of fetal measurement, growth, amniotic fluid, fetal anatomic survey, and activity patterns is appropriate.	None
US pregnant uterus biophysical profile	4	Assessment of biophysical profile is of indeterminate appropriateness. Biophysical profile components: 1) fetal heart-rate reactivity; 2) fetal breathing movements; 3) fetal movement; 4) fetal tone; and 5) amniotic fluid volume.	None
US pregnant uterus with Doppler	4	Assessment of umbilical arteries of indeterminate appropriateness. Evaluation of cerebral to umbilical artery ratio, cerebral arteries, and uterine arteries not appropriate.	None
<u>Rating Scale:</u> 1=Least appropriate, 9=Most appropriate			*Relative Radiation Level

Variant 2: Small fetus, low or low normal fluid, follow-up studies.

Radiologic Procedure	Rating	Comments	RRL*
US pregnant uterus	9	Optimal follow-up interval is 2-4 weeks. As the pregnancy enters the third trimester and approaches the time of possible (urgent) delivery, shorter scanning intervals may be indicated.	None
US pregnant uterus biophysical profile	8	Assessment of biophysical profile is appropriate. Biophysical profile components: 1) fetal heart-rate reactivity; 2) fetal breathing movements; 3) fetal movement; 4) fetal tone; and 5) amniotic fluid volume.	None
US pregnant uterus with Doppler	8	Doppler may provide important ancillary data to the BPP, but is not, in general, a stand-alone test.	None
<u>Rating Scale:</u> 1=Least appropriate, 9=Most appropriate			*Relative Radiation Level

Clinical Condition:**Growth Disturbances — Risk of Intrauterine Growth Restriction****Variant 3:****Very small fetus, normal fluid, follow-up studies.**

Radiologic Procedure	Rating	Comments	<u>RRL*</u>
US pregnant uterus	9	Optimal follow-up interval is 2-4 weeks. The interval of growth assessment should diminish both as fetal size estimate drops below 10% and as pregnancy advances into third trimester and toward possible (urgent) delivery.	None
US pregnant uterus biophysical profile	9	Assessment of biophysical profile is appropriate. Biophysical profile components: 1) fetal heart-rate reactivity; 2) fetal breathing movements; 3) fetal movement; 4) fetal tone; and 5) amniotic fluid volume.	None
US pregnant uterus with Doppler	8	Doppler may provide important ancillary data to the BPP.	None
Rating Scale: 1=Least appropriate, 9=Most appropriate			*Relative Radiation Level

Variant 4:**Normal sized fetus, low or absent fluid, follow-up studies.**

Radiologic Procedure	Rating	Comments	<u>RRL*</u>
US pregnant uterus	9	Optimal follow-up interval is 2 weeks.	None
US pregnant uterus biophysical profile	9	Assessment of biophysical profile is appropriate. Biophysical profile components: 1) fetal heart-rate reactivity; 2) fetal breathing movements; 3) fetal movement; 4) fetal tone; and 5) amniotic fluid volume.	None
US pregnant uterus with Doppler	8	Doppler may provide important ancillary data to the BPP, but is not, in general, a stand-alone test.	None
Rating Scale: 1=Least appropriate, 9=Most appropriate			*Relative Radiation Level

GROWTH DISTURBANCES — RISK OF INTRAUTERINE GROWTH RESTRICTION

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Summary of Literature Review

Intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR) is an important complication of pregnancy. It can be associated with significant risks of perinatal morbidity and mortality. One of the primary mechanisms of IUGR is uteroplacental insufficiency, which may occur in a variety of maternal or placental conditions. The major concern in IUGR is not the small size of the fetus, per se, but the possibility of life-threatening fetal compromise.

When clinically suspected, IUGR can be confirmed as probably present by sonographic fetal measurements and weight estimation, but both false-negative and false-positive cases can be anticipated. Findings that should prompt an ultrasound (US) examination include: maternal size smaller than dates or otherwise anticipated from a prior US, poor maternal weight gain, maternal hypertension, or pre-eclampsia. Other maternal conditions such as lupus erythematosus or a history of previous birth of a growth-restricted infant may also warrant evaluation.

The greater the risk of IUGR based on the clinical findings, the greater is the positive predictive value of US, but the likelihood of IUGR also increases even when US predicts a normal weight [1]. Estimated fetal weight and abdominal circumference are equivalently better than the ratio between femur length and abdominal circumference in predicting IUGR, and biometry performed within 2 weeks of delivery is more predictive than when performed at 26-34 weeks [2]. Dashe et al [3] found that among small-for-gestational-age (SGA) fetuses with no anatomic abnormalities, only those that were asymmetric (abdomen small in proportion to head) were associated with increased pregnancy-induced maternal hypertension

before 32 weeks and cesarean delivery for abnormal heart rate patterns compared with those of fetuses average for gestational age (AGA). Additionally, asymmetric SGA fetuses sustained more adverse neonatal composite outcomes compared to symmetric SGA or AGA fetuses.

Once a probability of IUGR has been established, and uteroplacental insufficiency is considered to be a likely mechanism based on US findings and clinical setting, there are a series of possible therapeutic interventions that can be used to improve fetal growth and try to prevent fetal compromise. Assessment of fetal well-being is essential to the management of such pregnancies. This testing is aimed at determining if there is life-threatening fetal compromise, and whether urgent premature delivery would offer a better chance of survival and avoidance of morbidity than would continued exposure to an increasingly hostile intrauterine environment [4,5].

Periodic fetal biometry, evaluation of amniotic fluid volume, use of the biophysical profile (BPP) or a selected subset of its component tests, Doppler US, fetal heart-rate monitoring, and fetal movement counting can all contribute to the determination of fetal compensation or compromise. It is beyond the scope of this guideline to compare these methods and rate the relative effectiveness of the many individual parameters testable alone or in various combinations. Instead, the guideline ranks the relative utility of these broad categories of fetal assessment once a risk of IUGR and potential fetal compromise has been established.

Biophysical Profile

The BPP has been and remains the mainstay of fetal well-being evaluation. It consists of four parameters variably sensitive to the acute exposure of the fetus to hypoxemia: fetal breathing movements, fetal limb and body movements, fetal tone, and amniotic fluid volume as an indicator of chronic hypoxemia. The nonstress test (NST), which is sometimes included with the BPP as a fifth component, can be used alone as a test of acute status, but it is often coupled with amniotic fluid measurement, a valuable reflection of fetal hypoxemic exposure over the previous week. Alternatively, the four sonographic BPP components can be used without the NST. Scores of 8-10 on the BPP are strong indicators of a well-compensated fetus, but there are many false positives when the fetus fails one or two of the acute marker tests [6]. Reduced amniotic fluid volume is an important predictor of intrapartum fetal distress, much of which is attributable to umbilical cord compression events, and the fluid volume should be periodically checked in pregnancies suspected to have IUGR [7]. Testing strategies usually evaluate one or more of the acute status parameters at least weekly, and often twice weekly, from the point of potential postnatal viability onward. Amniotic fluid is usually assessed weekly, but more often if it is approaching severely low levels. Daily or even more frequent testing by BPP or NST may be indicated in critical situations.

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The American College of Radiology seeks and encourages collaboration with other organizations on the development of the ACR Appropriateness Criteria through society representation on expert panels. Participation by representatives from collaborating societies on the expert panel does not necessarily imply society endorsement of the final document.

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Doppler Evaluation

Extensive research on Doppler analysis of uterine, umbilical, and various intrafetal vessels confirms a strong correlation between high-resistance arterial waveform patterns (eg, low, absent, or reversed diastolic flow in the umbilical artery) and subsequent IUGR, hypoxemic fetal morbidity, and mortality [8]. The correlation is greatest in high-risk pregnancies but insufficiently predictive in general, low-risk populations to be useful as a primary screening test [9,10].

Some have argued that since Doppler appears to be applicable primarily in a population already defined as high risk, the clinical decisions as to when a fetus is compromised and requires emergent delivery will be based on the BPP and heart-rate monitoring, making the Doppler superfluous. A recently published meta-analysis of 20 controlled trials of Doppler ultrasonography, however, found “compelling evidence” that knowledge of the Doppler findings improved perinatal outcome in high-risk pregnancies, reducing antenatal admissions, inductions of labor, and cesarean sections for fetal distress, and reducing the odds of perinatal death by 38% [11].

Studies correlating Doppler findings with the BPP, amniotic fluid volume, NST, US fetal weight estimates, and maternal blood pressure have shown that predictabilities of IUGR and fetal compromise are, to some extent, additive [12-16]. Doppler waveform abnormalities may precede clinical recognition of less-than-expected abdominal enlargement, with abnormal BPP an even later finding [17]. A review by Morris et al [18] summarizes many of these concepts about the sonographic assessment of IUGR. Dubinsky et al [19] found that decreased amniotic fluid and abnormal umbilical cord arterial Doppler waveforms were independent predictors of poor neonatal outcomes. A retrospective study by Ott [20] found that SGA singleton pregnancies with abnormal umbilical artery blood flow patterns had higher cesarean section rates for fetal nonreassuring status, increased neonatal intensive care unit stays, and increased neonatal morbidity. Those SGA fetuses with normal umbilical Doppler patterns were unassociated with these complications, suggesting that these were constitutionally small babies rather than being growth-restricted [19]. As the degree of fetal compromise progresses, there is a transition from a high-resistance middle cerebral artery (MCA) Doppler pattern to a low-resistance pattern, so-called cephalization of blood flow to protect the brain [8].

In addition to arterial Doppler, the fetal venous system can also be interrogated as a surrogate for forward cardiac blood flow [21]. In a recent study of fetuses with early-onset placental dysfunction, Baschat et al [22] demonstrated that ductus venosus Doppler parameters emerge as the primary cardiovascular factor in predicting neonatal outcome.

Fetal Movement Counting

An additional test of value in IUGR and other high-risk pregnancies is daily (or even more frequent) fetal movement counting by the mother. Frequent and vigorous fetal movements are evidence of well-being, providing reassurance to the mother, while diminishing fetal activity can provide an early warning of a deteriorating fetal status. The testing is easy and inexpensive but provides benefit in addition to the formal fetal surveillance protocols.

The specific variant conditions included in this Appropriateness Criteria® topic require several additional comments.

A fetus small for dates compared with an earlier US study in which amniotic fluid volume was low or low normal is the typical setting in which uteroplacental insufficiency is the most likely mechanism for IUGR. Repeat US for biometry is indicated, with the frequency adjusted by the severity of the growth restriction and the gestational age. Mild growth lag prior to 28-30 weeks can be remeasured in 4 weeks, while severe IUGR after 33 weeks may be best remeasured in 2 weeks. Some formal testing protocol for fetal well-being should be initiated on a weekly or twice-weekly schedule. Daily fetal movement counts are indicated.

IUGR caused by uteroplacental insufficiency is unusual when a normal amniotic fluid volume is present with a small or very small fetus. A first consideration should be the possibility of inaccurate dating of the pregnancy. This can be confirmed by follow-up US biometry that demonstrates appropriate interval growth of the fetal measurement parameters for the number of weeks intervening between the first and second examination. With a symmetrically very small fetus for dates, however, particularly if detected in the second or even first trimester, the possibility of aneuploidy, especially trisomy 18, trisomy 13, and triploidy, must be considered [23]. Needless to say, the presence of fetal anomalies will raise the concern for chromosomal abnormality considerably. Diagnosis is generally accomplished by amniocentesis, but if a rapid karyotype is needed (eg, to avoid a cesarean section because of fetal compromise of a fetus with a lethal condition), cordocentesis or placental biopsy can often provide an answer in 48-72 hours.

When there is low or absent amniotic fluid with a normally grown fetus, causes of oligohydramnios other than IUGR must be considered. These include obstruction or nonfunction of the fetal urinary tract, premature rupture of membranes, and tocolysis of preterm labor by nonsteroidals. Regardless of its etiology, oligohydramnios is an important risk factor for perinatal morbidity and mortality, due largely to umbilical cord compression but also, in cases of early and long-standing oligohydramnios, to the possible occurrence of pulmonary hypoplasia. Close monitoring of fetal condition is indicated along with periodic imaging evaluation of the fetus to check growth and chest configuration for degree of lung compression.

Safety Issues

Ultrasound

US is generally considered safe during pregnancy. As in any imaging procedure, the ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) principle should be followed. Cardiac activity may be documented in real time, or M-mode imaging. Because of higher energy levels, pulsed and color Doppler of the embryo should be avoided if possible. Pulsed and color Doppler may be extremely useful for other first trimester issues, including retained products of conception and adnexal masses [24].

Summary

- IUGR, with its inherent risks of fetal morbidity and mortality from the hypoxemia of inadequate uteroplacental function, must be considered a major abnormality of pregnancy.
- When it is suspected on the basis of clinical and sonographic findings, urgent management decisions may be necessary, including the possibility of emergent preterm delivery.
- A protocol of frequent fetal surveillance is indicated to guide patient management and the timing of delivery.

Relative Radiation Level Information

Potential adverse health effects associated with radiation exposure are an important factor to consider when selecting the appropriate imaging procedure. Because there is a wide range of radiation exposures associated with different diagnostic procedures, a relative radiation level (RRL) indication has been included for each imaging examination. The RRLs are based on effective dose, which is a radiation dose quantity that is used to estimate population total radiation risk associated with an imaging procedure. Additional information regarding radiation dose assessment for imaging examinations can be found in the ACR Appropriateness Criteria® [Radiation Dose Assessment Introduction](#) document.

Relative Radiation Level Designations	
Relative Radiation Level	Effective Dose Estimate Range
None	0
Minimal	< 0.1 mSv
Low	0.1-1 mSv
Medium	1-10 mSv
High	10-100 mSv

Supporting Document(s)

- [ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Overview](#)
- [Evidence Table](#)

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The ACR Committee on Appropriateness Criteria and its expert panels have developed criteria for determining appropriate imaging examinations for diagnosis and treatment of specified medical condition(s). These criteria are intended to guide radiologists, radiation oncologists and referring physicians in making decisions regarding radiologic imaging and treatment. Generally, the complexity and severity of a patient's clinical condition should dictate the selection of appropriate imaging procedures or treatments. Only those examinations generally used for evaluation of the patient's condition are ranked. Other imaging studies necessary to evaluate other co-existent diseases or other medical consequences of this condition are not considered in this document. The availability of equipment or personnel may influence the selection of appropriate imaging procedures or treatments. Imaging techniques classified as investigational by the FDA have not been considered in developing these criteria; however, study of new equipment and applications should be encouraged. The ultimate decision regarding the appropriateness of any specific radiologic examination or treatment must be made by the referring physician and radiologist in light of all the circumstances presented in an individual examination.

Appendix 1.

Entry Criteria

- Size smaller than dates by last menstrual period (LMP) or prior sonogram
- Poor maternal weight gain
- Maternal hypertension or pre-eclampsia

Comment

- Entry criteria apply individually to any one or more fetuses of a multiple pregnancy
- Use multiple pregnancy guidelines

Initial Evaluation: Obstetrical Sonogram

- Scan for size and dates and determine interval growth if there has been a previous scan
- Evaluate amniotic fluid volume (qualitative, largest pocket AP diameter, amniotic fluid index)
- Note fetal activity patterns
- Survey anatomy

Appendix 2. Guideline: Growth Disturbances/Growth Restriction

Outcomes

Normal size Normal fluid	Small size Normal fluid	Small size Asymmetrical Symmetrical Fluid low normal or low	Very small size Normal fluid	Normal size Low or absent fluid
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Normal	Inaccurate dates	Growth restriction	Possible aneuploidy and/or growth restriction	Urinary tract Abnormal rupture of membranes

Additional Studies

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
None	None	Biophysical profile Nonstress test Doppler flow studies	Detailed anatomic survey Karyotype- amniocentesis Cordocentesis Biophysical profile Nonstress test Doppler flow studies	Detailed anatomic survey Clinical exam for leaking fluid Amnioinfusion with dye to check for leakage and to improve anatomic survey

Follow-up Studies

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
None	Same	US scan for growth ≤27 wk – f/u in 4 wks 28-32 wk – f/u in 3 wks ≥33 wk – f/u in 2 wks plus BPP, NST, Doppler Fetal movement counting	Same	Urinary non- function Clinical manage- ment	PROM Clinical manage- ment