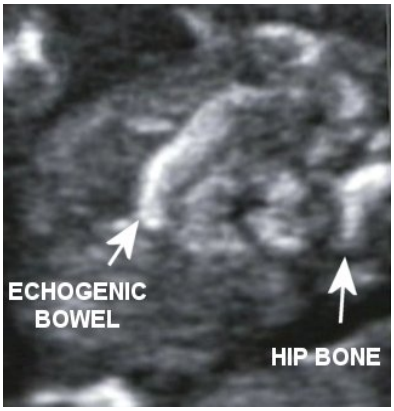
San Gabriel Valley Perinatal Medical Group.

Echogenic Bowel (also known as hyperechoic bowel)



Tissues that reflect sound waves very well , such as bone, are called echogenic and will appear very bright (white) during an ultrasound examination. Sometimes the developing baby's intestines (also known as bowel or gut) will reflect sound better than usual and appear to be brighter than expected. Bowel that appears to be as bright as the bones of the fetus is called echogenic bowel (EB). EB may be seen in almost 2% of ultrasound examinations performed during the second trimester

The bowels may appear brighter than usual if there is a large amount of meconium in the intestines . Meconium is the normal mucous-like, green contents of the fetal intestine. Sometimes blood from a clot under the placenta, or from a procedure (such as amniocentesis) may leak into the amniotic fluid and be swallowed by the developing baby. The swallowed blood will cause the baby's intestines to appear echogenic until the blood has been absorbed by the baby's intestines. About one in three fetuses with echogenic bowel will have an abnormal condition. The fetus in the sonogram pictured above right had a ring chromosome 13.

Causes of Echogenic Bowel

- Echogenic bowel may be part of a baby's normal development
- Swallowed blood may cause the baby's intestines to appear very bright temporarily.
- Chromosome abnormalities, in particular Down syndrome, can cause the intestines to move more slowly allowing meconium to build up and become thicker.
- Cystic fibrosis
    - Cystic fibrosis is an inherited condition that causes thick mucus to build up in the lungs and digestive tract.
- Infections such as cytomegalovirus (CMV) and parvovirus .
- Intestinal blockage or malformation
- Alpha-thalassemia

Evaluation

- Amniocentesis may be offered to you to count and examine the chromosomes of the baby.
    - Chromosomes are the structures in the cells of your body that are inherited from each of your parents and hold the instructions for how your body looks and functions. Amniocentesis is a test in which a fine needle is inserted into the uterus , and a sample of the fluid that surrounds the baby is removed to obtain the baby's cells that are present in the fluid. The cells are then examined for chromosome abnormalities such as Down syndrome. The amniotic fluid can also be tested for other conditions such as infections if indicated.
- Blood tests can be done to see if the parents of the baby are carriers for cystic fibrosis .
- Blood tests (IgG and IgM titers) can be done to test for infections. Additional blood tests as indicated by your ethnic background or genetic history.
- Because echogenic bowel has been associated with poor growth in some fetuses, evaluation of fetal growth at regular intervals is recommended.

Although it is not possible to identify all problems during pregnancy if all of the above testing is normal, your baby will more than likely be healthy at birth.