

Second and Third Trimester Vaginal Bleeding

Vaginal bleeding (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/vaginalbleeding>) is less common during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy than during the first trimester. There are many different causes for vaginal bleeding during pregnancy. Bleeding can be normal. In about half the cases, the reason for the bleeding is never found. However, the bleeding may be caused by something serious for either the mother or the baby. Imaging with ultrasound is the most accurate way to determine the reason for vaginal bleeding during pregnancy.

Transabdominal ultrasound (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/abdominus>) (performed using a probe on the outside of the body, through the lower abdomen) is usually appropriate for evaluation of bleeding with or without pain during the second and third trimesters. Transvaginal ultrasound (performed using a probe inside the vagina) is appropriate and may be used to evaluate the cervix and the placenta. Ultrasound with Doppler (to look at blood vessels) is also appropriate. Two or three of these tests may be performed together during the same examination. Transperineal ultrasound (performed with the probe on the outside of the vagina) may also be appropriate.

Possible causes of bleeding during the second and third trimester include placenta previa (placenta crosses the cervix), low-lying placenta (placenta is close to the cervix), and vasa previa (blood vessels to the umbilical cord cross the cervix). When doctors suspect these problems, transabdominal ultrasound, transvaginal ultrasound (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/pelvus>), and ultrasound with Doppler are usually appropriate. Two or three of these tests may be performed together during the same examination.

For more information, see the Abnormal Vaginal Bleeding (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/vaginalbleeding>) page.

— By Samantha Greben, BA and Nina S. Vincoff, MD. This information originally appeared in the *Journal of the American College of Radiology*.

Disclaimer

This information is copied from the RadiologyInfo Web site (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org>) which is dedicated to providing the highest quality information. To ensure that, each section is reviewed by a physician with expertise in the area presented. All information contained in the Web site is further reviewed by an ACR (American College of Radiology) - RSNA (Radiological Society of North America) committee, comprising physicians with expertise in several radiologic areas.

However, it is not possible to assure that this Web site contains complete, up-to-date information on any particular subject. Therefore, ACR and RSNA make no representations or warranties about the suitability of this information for use for any particular purpose. All information is provided "as is" without express or implied warranty.

Please visit the RadiologyInfo Web site at <http://www.radiologyinfo.org> to view or download the latest information.

Note: Images may be shown for illustrative purposes. Do not attempt to draw conclusions or make diagnoses by comparing these images to other medical images, particularly your own. Only qualified physicians should interpret images; the radiologist is the physician expert trained in medical imaging.

Copyright

This material is copyrighted by either the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA), 820 Jorie Boulevard, Oak Brook, IL 60523-2251 or the American College of Radiology (ACR), 1891 Preston White Drive, Reston, VA 20191-4397. Commercial reproduction or multiple distribution by any traditional or electronically based reproduction/publication method is prohibited.

Copyright © 2026 Radiological Society of North America, Inc.