AIUM Practice Guideline for the Performance of Scrotal Ultrasound Examinations

Guideline developed in collaboration with the American College of Radiology and the Society of Radiologists in Ultrasound.
The American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM) is a multidisciplinary association dedicated to advancing the safe and effective use of ultrasound in medicine through professional and public education, research, development of guidelines, and accreditation. To promote this mission, the AIUM is pleased to publish in conjunction with the American College of Radiology (ACR) and the Society of Radiologists in Ultrasound (SRU) this AIUM Practice Guideline for the Performance of Scrotal Ultrasound Examinations.

The AIUM represents the entire range of clinical and basic science interests in medical diagnostic ultrasound, and, with hundreds of volunteers, this multidisciplinary organization has promoted the safe and effective use of ultrasound in clinical medicine for more than 50 years. This document and others like it will continue to advance this mission.

Practice guidelines of the AIUM are intended to provide the medical ultrasound community with guidelines for the performance and recording of high-quality ultrasound examinations. The guidelines reflect what the AIUM considers the minimum criteria for a complete examination in each area but are not intended to establish a legal standard of care. AIUM-accredited practices are expected to generally follow the guidelines with recognition that deviations from these guidelines will be needed in some cases, depending on patient needs and available equipment. Practices are encouraged to go beyond the guidelines to provide additional service and information as needed.
I. Introduction
The clinical aspects contained in specific sections of this guideline (Introduction, Indications, Specifications of the Examination, and Equipment Specifications) were developed collaboratively by the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM), the American College of Radiology (ACR), and the Society of Radiologists in Ultrasound (SRU). Recommendations for physician requirements, written request for the examination, procedure documentation, and quality control vary among the three organizations and are addressed by each separately.

These guidelines are intended to assist practitioners performing ultrasound studies of the scrotum. In some cases, additional and/or specialized examinations may be necessary. While it is not possible to detect every abnormality, adherence to the following guidelines will maximize the probability of detecting most of the abnormalities that occur in the scrotum.

II. Qualifications and Responsibilities of the Physician

III. Indications
Indications for scrotal ultrasound include but are not limited to:
1. Evaluation of scrotal pain, including but not limited to testicular trauma, ischemia/torsion, and infectious or inflammatory scrotal disease.
2. Evaluation of palpable inguinal, scrotal, or scrotal masses.
3. Evaluation of scrotal asymmetry, swelling, or enlargement.
4. Evaluation of potential scrotal hernias.
5. Detection/evaluation of varicoceles.
7. Follow-up of prior indeterminate scrotal ultrasound findings.
8. Localization of undescended testes.
10. Follow-up of patients with prior primary testicular neoplasms, leukemia, or lymphoma.
11. Evaluation of abnormalities noted on other imaging studies (including but not limited to computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, and positron emission tomography).
12. Evaluation of intersex conditions.

IV. Written Request for the Examination
The written or electronic request for an ultrasound examination should provide sufficient information to allow for the appropriate performance and interpretation of the examination.

The request for the examination must be originated by a physician or other appropriately licensed health care provider or under their direction. The accompanying clinical information should be provided by a physician or appropriate health care provider familiar with the patient's clinical situation and should be consistent with relevant legal and local health care facility requirements.

V. Specifications of the Examination
The testes should be evaluated in at least 2 planes: longitudinal and transverse. Transverse images should be obtained in the superior, mid, and inferior portions of the testes. Longitudinal views should be obtained centrally as well as medially and laterally. Each testis should be evaluated in its entirety, as should the epididymis (head, body, and tail) when technically feasible. The size and echogenicity of each testis and epididymis should be compared to the contralateral side. Comparison of the testes, including gray scale and color Doppler imaging, is best accomplished with a side-by-side transverse image. Scrotal skin thickness should be evaluated. If a palpable abnormality is the indication for the sonogram, this area should be directly imaged.

Relevant extratesticular structures should be evaluated. Additional techniques such as the Valsalva maneuver or upright positioning can be used as needed. Any abnormality should be documented.

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Doppler sonography (spectral and color/power Doppler imaging) should be used as necessary in all examinations of the scrotum, particularly in the setting of acute scrotal pain. If used, color and/or power Doppler sonography should include at least 1 side-by-side image comparing both testes and 2 images with identical Doppler settings to evaluate symmetry of flow. Low-flow detection settings should be used to document testicular blood flow, and the transducer frequency should be optimized for maximum Doppler sensitivity while maintaining adequate penetration. If flow cannot be demonstrated on color Doppler imaging, power Doppler imaging, if available, should be used to increase flow sensitivity.

VI. Documentation

Adequate documentation is essential for high-quality patient care. There should be a permanent record of the ultrasound examination and its interpretation. Images of all appropriate areas, both normal and abnormal, should be recorded. Variations from normal size should be accompanied by measurements. Images should be labeled with the patient identification, facility identification, examination date, and side (right or left) of the anatomic site imaged. An official interpretation (final report) of the ultrasound findings should be included in the patient's medical record. Retention of the ultrasound examination should be consistent both with clinical needs and with relevant legal and local health care facility requirements.

Reporting should be in accordance with the AIUM Practice Guideline for Documentation of an Ultrasound Examination.

VII. Equipment Specifications

Scrotal studies should be conducted with a real-time scanner, preferably using a 7- to 14-MHz linear array transducer. A curvilinear or vector transducer with lower frequencies may be needed if the scrotum is enlarged, recognizing that there is a trade-off between resolution and beam penetration. The highest possible Doppler frequencies (typically in the 5- to 10-MHz range) providing optimal resolution and flow detection should be used. The Doppler frequency may differ from the imaging frequency. Standoff pads can be used, if necessary, to improve imaging.

VIII. Quality Control and Improvement, Safety, Infection Control, and Patient Education

Policies and procedures related to quality control, patient education, infection control, and safety should be developed and implemented in accordance with the AIUM Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Ultrasound Practices.

Equipment performance monitoring should be in accordance with the AIUM Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Ultrasound Practices.

IX. ALARA Principle

The potential benefits and risks of each examination should be considered. The ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) principle should be observed when adjusting controls that affect the acoustic output and by considering transducer dwell times. Further details on ALARA may be found in the AIUM publication Medical Ultrasound Safety, Second Edition.

Acknowledgments

This guideline was revised by the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM) in collaboration with the American College of Radiology (ACR) and the Society of Radiologists in Ultrasound (SRU) according to the process described in the AIUM Clinical Standards Committee Manual.

Collaborative Committee

ACR
Ruth B. Goldstein, MD, Chair
Nirvikar Dahiya, MD
Rick I. Feld, MD

AIUM
Michael C. Hill, MB
William D. Middleton, MD
Thomas C. Winter, III, MD

SRU
Brian D. Coley, MD
Vikram S. Dogra, MD
Sharlene A. Teeffy, MD
Suggested Reading

Articles that are not cited in the document but that the committee recommends for further reading on this topic.