As you know an ultrasound scan of your baby has shown that the baby’s bowel has an unusual appearance known as ‘echogenic’ or ‘bright’ bowel.

What is Echogenic Bowel?

The bowel is described as ‘echogenic’ when it reflects more ultrasound than normal. This causes it to appear whiter or brighter on the ultrasound screen than other abdominal organs.

Why does it occur?

We often do not find a reason why a baby has a bowel that is brighter than normal.

Sometimes it may be due to bleeding within the womb in early pregnancy. This may not be noticed by the mother, but the baby may swallow some of the blood which gives this ‘bright’ appearance on scan.

In some cases it may be due to an infection in the mother that has crossed the placenta to the baby. A blood test can be performed to check for this.

It may also be due to a condition called Cystic Fibrosis, which is a genetic disease. A baby can only be affected if both parents are carriers of the Cystic Fibrosis gene. We can perform a blood test to see whether both parents have this gene, in which case the baby is at risk of developing Cystic Fibrosis.

A small proportion of cases of echogenic bowel may be associated with an underlying chromosome problem in the baby. We will discuss this with you and you may be offered an amniocentesis to check the baby’s chromosomes. Sometimes this can also be associated with the placenta, (afterbirth), which is not working properly.

Will my baby have other abnormalities?

We will carry out a detailed ultrasound scan of your baby, and look very carefully for other abnormalities that may be detected by a scan. It is not however possible to see all problems that babies maybe born with.
What happens now?

Following your scan we will discuss the various choices and tests with you. If you choose to have further tests performed, we will inform you of the results as soon as we have them. If one of the tests identifies a problem, we will fully discuss the possible implications with you.

If no underlying cause is found for the echogenic bowel, then we would usually arrange for further scans to check the baby’s growth later in the pregnancy.

If you have any questions about what we have said, please do not hesitate to contact us. Your G.P., Midwife or Obstetrician may also be able to give you more information.

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Revised January 2006