

Poster number 4297492

Visualization of fetal ears in detailed ultrasound scan at 20-30 weeks of gestation: time for inclusion in morphological reports?

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Introduction

Ear abnormalities in postnatal life, are seen from 0.3 to 2.4 per 1000 pregnancies. However, in recent second trimester ultrasound guidelines, visualization of the fetal ears remains optional.

Our aim was to study the ability to observe the fetal ears in anatomical ultrasound scans between 20-30 weeks.

Methods:

This study was conducted across two maternal-fetal units. Experienced physicians searched for fetal ears on anatomical ultrasounds between 20-30 weeks of gestation. A total of 242 patients were prospectively evaluated between July 2024 and February 2025. The ears were searched in 2D sagittal planes to achieve their complete visualization.

Results:

Of the 242 patients assessed, both ears were successfully visualized in 225 cases (93%). At least one ear was visualized in 16 cases (6.6%), while neither ear could be seen only in 1 one case.

Visualization was achieved in 82% of cases when the fetal nape was positioned anteriorly, requiring scanning of both sides of the baby's head (Fig 1). In the remaining cases, visualization occurred with the fetal nape facing the posterior uterine wall.

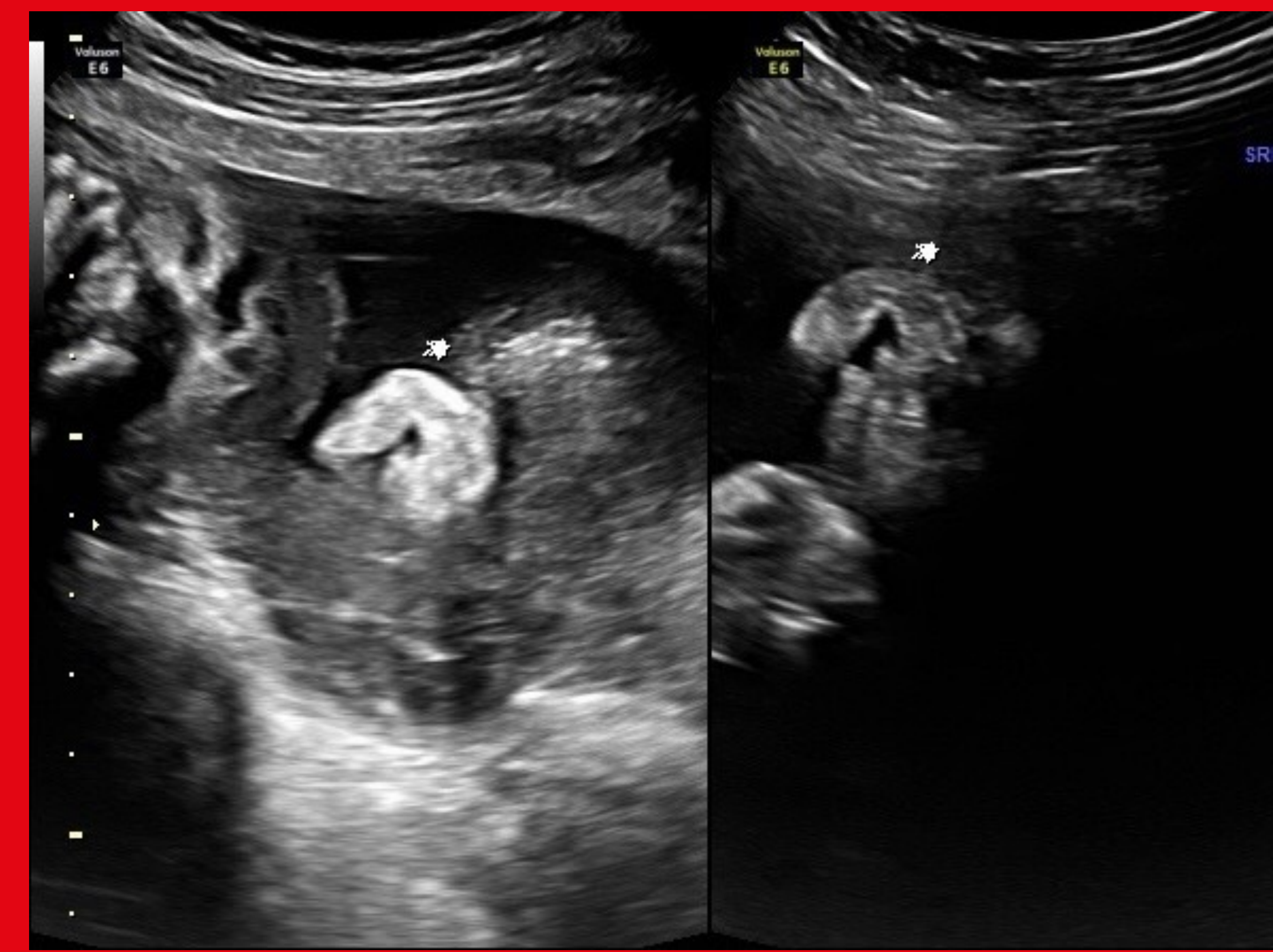


Figure 1. Visualization of fetal ears when the fetal nape was positioned anteriorly, requiring scanning of both sides of the baby's head

CONCLUSION

Fetal ears can be readily observed in most cases during second-trimester anatomical ultrasound scans, and the process is not time-consuming. Given our findings, we suggest the routine inclusion of fetal ear visualization in second-trimester anatomical checklists.