



In touch with **YOUR BABY**

A guide to your baby's
movements during
pregnancy



Why are my baby's movements important?

Why are we asking women to get to know their baby's movements?

One of the easiest ways to tell if your baby is healthy is to be aware of how much he or she is moving. Every baby is different and we are asking women to take time to become familiar with their baby's own individual pattern of movements. A reduction or change in **your** baby's movements is what is important.

What can affect my baby's movements?

You are less likely to be aware of your baby's movements when active or busy. Some drugs e.g. strong pain relief or sedatives can get into an unborn baby's circulation and affect the movements. Alcohol and smoking (active and passive smoking) may also affect the baby.

Why are my baby's movements important?

If you notice your baby is moving less than usual, or the pattern of movements has changed, this could be the first sign that your baby may not be well or is not growing properly in the womb. Research has shown that a reduction in the baby's movements may indicate an increased risk of stillbirth. You may hear your midwife or doctor referring to 'reduced fetal movement', or RFM for short.

What are the risks of stillbirth?

Stillbirth affects one in 200 babies after 24 weeks gestation and is one of the most common of the serious complications of pregnancy, affecting the lives of around 4,000 families every year in the UK.

One of the easiest ways to tell if your baby is healthy is to see how much he or she is moving. This booklet tells you what to look out for during your pregnancy.

Every baby is different. It is good to get to know your baby's own movements and the pattern of their sleeping and waking and report to us if you notice a reduction in these movements.



**18-24
WEEKS**



Most women begin to feel their baby move between 18-24 weeks. At first it may feel like 'bubbles', 'flutterings' or 'like trapped wind'. These are often very short and stop and start. It might take you a little while to be sure what you are feeling. But you will soon get to know the feelings. If this is your second baby, you will know what to look out for and may recognise your baby moving sooner.

Everyone is different when it comes to their movements. There are many reasons you might not feel movements as early as you expect. This includes your body weight, the position of your baby and the location of your placenta. What is important is your baby is growing well. Your midwife will be able to discuss this with you further at your 22 week check.

Try to get to know the times of the day when you are most likely to feel your baby move.



24-36
WEEKS



You will have your own way of describing your baby's own movements. Women often describe their baby's movements as 'rolling', 'kicking', 'pushing', 'jabs', 'elbowing' and 'stretches'.

Between 24-36 weeks you will start to recognise your baby's movements more quickly and become more used to the feeling. It is usually easier to feel your baby's movements when you are lying down, e.g. at night time. It is harder to feel your baby move when you are on your feet and moving around.

Try to get to know the times of the day you are most likely to feel your baby move. This will help you to know if he or she is moving less than normal or if movements have stopped.

Occasionally your baby will get hiccups. These do not count as movements. If you are unsure what you should expect when your baby hiccups, speak to your midwife.

Your baby's movements might feel different, but how often your baby moves should not



36-42
WEEKS



At 36-42 weeks, your baby will have less room for big movements and what you are likely to feel are arm or leg movements, and rolling.

Your baby's movements might feel different, but how often your baby moves should not. If you notice that your baby has not moved as much as usual, or if the movements stop, follow the advice contained in this booklet.

Some people may tell you that your baby will move less frequently in late pregnancy and before you go into labour. This is not so. It is important that you report any change, as it might be a sign that your baby is unwell.



If you have not felt your baby move as he or she would usually move then:



1: Find space and time to lie down for **one hour** on your left side.



2: Have a hot or a cool drink.



3: Don't watch TV or read or become otherwise distracted.

If you are still worried that your baby has stopped moving or is moving less than normal, call your maternity unit immediately. You should also call straight away if your baby has gradually reduced their movements over several days.

Get help straight away.
DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT DAY TO SEEK HELP

If you are asked to go to your maternity unit because you have noticed that your baby is moving less, your midwife or doctor will ask you about your baby's movements and you and your baby's health.

You will have a full antenatal check-up, including checking your baby's heartbeat.

You may have an ultrasound scan within 24 hours. This checks the amount of fluid around your baby. This is called amniotic fluid. The ultrasound scan will also check how well your baby is growing.

If you are over 27 weeks pregnant, your baby's heart rate will be monitored for at least 20 minutes. You should be able to see your baby's heart rate increase as he or she moves.

In most cases these tests and checks usually provide reassurance that all is well. A proportion of women who notice reduced fetal movement have a problem with the baby's growth. However, most women who experience an episode of reduction in their baby's movements have a straightforward pregnancy and go on to deliver a healthy baby.

When you go home you will be asked to keep an eye on your baby's movements. If your baby's movements reduce again, you should contact your midwife or local maternity unit immediately.

Do not hesitate to contact your midwife or local maternity unit for advice no matter how many times this happens.



Your hospital is involved in a research study called AFFIRM. AFFIRM will find out whether increasing women's and clinicians' awareness of the importance of your baby's movements will improve pregnancy care and reduce stillbirth.

In order to work out if the information and better care is a good idea, the researchers will be sent some anonymised information on pregnancy outcome (for example the weight of the baby at birth) for all women who have their babies in this hospital. These details will be collected from your case notes, and no one will be able to identify you or your baby. If you don't wish your anonymised information to be used, please inform your local midwife or doctor who will speak to the lead researcher in your hospital.



WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU ARE CONCERNED:

(space for sticky with local contact information)

