



Your baby's movements in pregnancy

About this information

This information is for you if you would like to know about your baby's movements during pregnancy. It may also be helpful if you are concerned that your baby has not been moving as much as usual or if you feel that your baby's movements have changed.

It tells you about:

- What are normal movements for your baby
- What affects how much you feel your baby move
- What to do if your baby's movements have slowed down or changed
- What care you will have if your baby's movements have slowed down or changed.

This information aims to help you and your healthcare team make the best decisions about your care. Your healthcare team is there to support you in making decisions that are right for you. They can help by discussing your situation with you and answering your questions.

It is not meant to replace advice from a healthcare professional about your own situation.

Within this leaflet we may use the terms 'woman' and 'women'. However, it is not only people who identify as women who may need to access this leaflet. Your care should be personalised, inclusive and sensitive to your needs whatever your gender identity.

A glossary of all medical terms is available on the RCOG website at: [rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/a-z-of-medical-terms/](https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/a-z-of-medical-terms/).

Key points

- You will usually become aware of your baby moving around 16-24 weeks of pregnancy, with babies establishing a pattern of movement at around 28 weeks.
- If your baby's movements have slowed down or changed, it may be an early sign that your baby is unwell. You should attend your maternity department immediately for further checks if you notice this happening.
- Your healthcare professional will listen to your baby's heart rate. If you are more than 26 weeks' pregnant, your baby's heart rate will be monitored using a machine called a **CTG**. Sometimes, an ultrasound scan may be arranged to check the growth of your baby.
- Most women are reassured after the tests are done and go on to have healthy babies.
- If there are concerns about your baby's wellbeing, your healthcare professional may recommend an earlier birth. This will depend on how far along in your pregnancy you are and your individual circumstances.

What are normal movements for your baby?

37 Most women are first aware of their baby moving when they are 16-24 weeks pregnant. If you
38 have not been pregnant before, you may become aware of the movements later than women
39 who have been pregnant before. You may feel your baby's movements as a kick, flutter, swish or
40 roll.

41 Usually, afternoon and evening periods are times of peak activity for your baby. During both day
42 and night, your baby has sleep periods that mostly last between 20 and 40 minutes, and are rarely
43 longer than 90 minutes. Your baby will usually not move during these sleep periods.

44 Your baby's movements tend to increase until 32 weeks of pregnancy and then stay about the
45 same. The type of movement may change as you get nearer to your due date. Kicks may be
46 replaced by rolling, stretching and pushing. Often, if you are busy, you may not notice all of these
47 movements.

48 You should continue to feel your baby move right up to the time you go into labour. Your baby
49 should move during labour too.

51 **Why are my baby's movements important?**

52 During your pregnancy, feeling your baby move normally gives you reassurance about their
53 wellbeing. If you notice your baby is moving less than usual or your baby's movements have
54 stopped it may be the first sign that your baby is unwell.

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56 A steady increase in movements usually means that your baby is getting stronger and is well.
57 However, if you feel your baby suddenly have a short period of 'crazy' movement – that some
58 women might describe as 'wild' or 'ballistic' - this can also indicate baby might not be well.

59 **How many movements are enough?**

60 There is no specific number of movements that is normal. During your pregnancy, you need to be
61 aware of **your** baby's individual pattern of movements. A reduction or a change in **your** baby's
62 movements is what is important.

63 **What can affect me feeling my baby move?**

64 You are less likely to be aware of your baby's movements when you are active or busy.

65 If your placenta (afterbirth) is at the front of your uterus (womb), it may not be so easy for you to
66 feel your baby's movements. However, this will not be a cause of a change in your baby's
67 movements.

68 Your weight does not affect how easily you feel your baby move.

69 **What can cause my baby to move less?**

70 Certain drugs such as strong pain relief or sedatives can get into your baby's circulation and can
71 make your baby move less. Alcohol and smoking may also affect your baby's movements.

72 In some cases, a baby may move less because they are unwell. Rarely, a baby may have a
73 condition affecting their muscles or nerves that causes them to move very little or not at all.

74 **Should I use a chart to count my baby's movements?**

75 There is not enough evidence to recommend the routine use of a movement chart. It is more
76 important for you to be aware of your baby's individual pattern of movements throughout your
77 pregnancy.

78 You should seek immediate help if you feel that the movements have slowed down.

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80 **What should I do if I feel my baby's movements have slowed** 81 **down or changed?**

82 Always seek professional help immediately. Never go to sleep ignoring a change in your baby's
83 movements. Do not rely on any home kits you may have for listening to your baby's heartbeat.

84 The care you will be given will depend on the stage of your pregnancy:

85 **Less than 24 weeks pregnant**

86 Most women first become aware of their baby moving when they are 16–24 weeks pregnant.

87 If by 24 weeks you have never felt your baby move, you should contact your midwife, who will
88 check your baby's heartbeat. An ultrasound scan may be arranged and you may be referred to a
89 specialist fetal medicine centre to check your baby's wellbeing.

90 **Between 24 weeks and 26 weeks pregnant**

91 You should contact your midwife, who will check your baby's heartbeat. You will have a full
92 antenatal check-up that includes:

- 93 • checking the size of your uterus
- 94 • measuring your blood pressure
- 95 • testing your urine for protein.

96 If your uterus (womb) measures smaller than expected, an ultrasound scan may be arranged to
97 check on how your baby is growing.

98 **Over 26 weeks pregnant**

99 You will be asked about your baby's movements. You will have a full antenatal check-up, including
100 checking your baby's heartbeat.

101 Your baby's heart rate will be monitored using a machine called a CTG. This should give you
102 reassurance about your baby's wellbeing.

103 An ultrasound scan to check on the growth of your baby, as well as the amount of amniotic fluid
104 around your baby, may be arranged if:

- 105 • Your uterus measures smaller than expected
- 106 • Your pregnancy has risk factors ~~linked~~ with stillbirth
- 107 • The heart-rate monitoring is normal but you still feel that your baby's movements are less
108 than usual
- 109 • You have attended before with concerns about your baby's movements
- 110 • You have not had a scan already in the last two weeks.

111 These investigations usually provide reassurance that all is well. Most women who have one
112 episode of change in their baby's movements have a straightforward pregnancy and go on to
113 have a healthy baby.

114 If there are any concerns about your baby, your healthcare professional will discuss this with you.
115 Follow-up scans may be arranged.

116 If you are more than 39 weeks pregnant, you may be offered an induction of labour. Before 39
117 weeks, the risks of induction of labour to you and your baby need to be carefully considered
118 depending on your individual circumstances.

119 Sometimes, you may be advised that it would be safer for your baby to be born urgently. In this
120 situation, a caesarean birth may be advised.

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122 **What should I do if I find my baby's movements have slowed** 123 **down or changed again?**

124 You will be advised to continue to monitor on your baby's movements. If you are concerned again
125 about their movements, you should contact your local maternity unit immediately. Never hesitate
126 to contact your midwife or local maternity unit for advice, no matter how many times this
127 happens.

128 **Emotional support**

129 Finding out that your baby's movements have changed can be very stressful. If you are feeling
130 anxious or worried in any way, please speak to your healthcare team who can answer your
131 questions and help you get support.

132 **Further information**

133 **Green top guideline no. 57 Reduced fetal movements**

134 Tommy's website: tommys.org/pregnancy-information/pregnancy-symptom-checker/baby-fetal-
135 [movements](http://tommys.org/pregnancy-information/pregnancy-symptom-checker/baby-fetal-)

136 **Making a choice**

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Making a choice

Ask 3 Questions

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



1. What are my options?
2. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?
3. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?

*Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85

<http://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>

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Sources and acknowledgements

This information has been developed by the RCOG Patient Information Committee. It is based on the RCOG guideline *Reduced Fetal Movements* (updated XXXXX). The guideline contains a full list of the sources of evidence we have used. You can find it online at: www.rcog.org.uk/womens-health/clinical-guidance/reduced-fetal-movements-green-top-57.

PEER REVIEW draft