

Your baby's movements while in utero.

It's reassuring for every pregnant person to feel their baby move, and any perceived lack of movement can leave you fearing the worst. Baby movements in your uterus, also known as fetal movements or 'kicks', can feel like anything from a flutter, kick, swish or roll. The type of movement may change as your pregnancy progresses.

But monitoring your baby is no longer about counting kicks every day, the best way to monitor your baby is to understand the patterns of movement and rest. There's no set number of movements you should feel each day – every baby is different. You do not need to count the number of kicks or movements – the important thing is to get to know your baby's usual movements from day to day.

When to start monitoring your baby's movements:

In a first pregnancy, you should be able to feel movements anywhere between 17 and 20 weeks (and occasionally later, especially if you have a front-lying placenta). These first movements can often feel like butterflies in your belly. For second or subsequent pregnancies, it can be even earlier.

How to monitor your baby's movements

Once you've felt those movements for a few weeks, you'll begin to notice a rhythm to your baby's routine – remember each baby is different and there's no set pattern, so it's important to take time to get to know your baby.

By around 24 weeks gestation, they'll begin to form a discernible pattern of movement and rest, and this can be influenced by you and your daily routine. If you're really active, your baby might be active at the same time, or they could be rocked to sleep by your movements instead. If you put your feet up, your baby might take the opportunity to snooze too, or they might choose to get their wriggle on because you've finally stopped.

Getting to know how your baby reacts to your routine, what you do and eat etc, helps you to understand your baby's own routine, which is very useful.

Why do my baby's movements matter?

They can help reassure you that everything is progressing as expected. Monitoring your baby's movements helps you connect with your baby and interact with them. It's important because this is where their development begins, so even before they are born you can be nurturing their future growth and even education.

Monitoring movements means you can also notice if there's a change, and this is important because although your uterus protects your baby from most things, the stress hormone cortisol can still put your pregnancy and unborn baby's wellbeing at risk. Changes to your baby's routine are one sign that something may be wrong. If you get the right treatment and care as soon as you can this could save your baby's life.

Is there anything that can affect being able to feel my baby move?

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

If your placenta is at the front of your uterus, it may not be easy for you to feel your baby's movements.

But don't assume this is why you can't feel your baby's movements. If you think your baby's movements have slowed down, stopped or changed contact your LMC or maternity unit immediately. It's always best to get checked.

Can I use a home doppler to check on my baby?

Do not use any hand-held monitors, dopplers or phone apps to check your baby's heartbeat. Even if you think you detect a heartbeat, this does not mean your baby is well because it might be your own heartbeat. You need to be checked by a healthcare professional.

You need to be monitored by a cardiotocography machine (CTG) or a midwife who can interpret the baby's heartbeat.

What to look for in baby's movements

Small changes are normal. What you must look out for is big or sudden changes such as:

- Reduced movements: if your baby's pattern of movements suddenly reduces when you know they'd usually be active, for instance. You can try doing things that you know would normally wake baby up, so go for a walk if you know they're usually active when you are active
- No movement at all: sometimes movements can become such an ingrained part of our own routine that we don't notice when something changes. If you notice no movement at all from your baby, this can be a cause for concern
- Excessive movements: this is something few mums seem to know about. If your baby suddenly has excessive movements and nothing seems to stop it, it can be a sign it's in distress

If you notice any of the above, call your LMC team immediately for help and advice.

Do not wait until the next day to seek advice if you are worried about your baby's movements

There is staff on the hospital maternity unit 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If the movements have slowed down does it mean my baby is not well?

Fewer movements could mean that your baby is unwell, but usually, these checks reveal that everything is OK. Most Mummies who have experienced one episode of fewer movements go on to have a straightforward pregnancy and healthy baby. However, it is very important that you are checked to make sure everything is OK.

What if my baby's movements are reduced again?

If, after your check-up, you are still not happy with your baby's movement, you must contact either your LMC or maternity unit straight away, even if everything was OK last time.

NEVER HESITATE to contact your LMC or the maternity unit for advice, no matter how many times this happens.

