



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Monitoring your baby's heartbeat in labour

Issued by Obstetrics and Gynaecology

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[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

## What is fetal heart monitoring and why is it necessary?

We want you to have a healthy baby and the best possible experience of birth.

In order to achieve this, there are some checks we will do to make sure that you are both coping well. For mum, this will include checking your temperature, pulse and blood pressure regularly.

For baby, we can monitor your baby's heart beat. This is called fetal heart monitoring and is the same as checking your bay's pulse.

Performing fetal heart monitoring allows us to assess your baby's well being.

## How can we moitor your baby's heart?

Your baby's heart rate can be monitored in two ways:

1. At regular intervals called intermittent auscultation (IA)
2. Continuously by electronic fetal monitoring (EFM) or also known as Cardiotocography (CTG).

## Intermittent auscultation

For the vast majority of women, who are low-risk, we offer intermittent auscultation. This means that we listen to your baby's heart using an instrument. This could be an ear trumpet also known as a Pinnard stethoscope or a hand held Doppler ultrasound.

Your midwife will have used a similar machine to listen to your baby's heart in the antenatal clinic.

We will listen in for 1 minute every 15 minutes following a contraction during the first stage of labour (while the cervix is dilating). During the second stage (when you are pushing) we will listen for 1 minute after every contraction or at least once every 5 minutes.

If we have any concerns with you or your baby's well being, we will recommend continuous electronic fetal monitoring. If you are delivering in a midwifery-led unit at home, you will need to be transferred to a consultant-led delivery unit.

Your midwife will discuss this with you.

## **Continuous electronic fetal monitoring (EFM or CTG)**

EFM is the recommended method for monitoring your baby's heart beat in labour if you have a health problem or any factor relating to your pregnancy/labour which may put you or your baby at high risk.

Health and pregnancy problems/factors include:

- If a concern is detected using IA
- Bleeding
- Infection
- Fluid from around the baby is not clear
- Use of a hormone drip to induce labour (Syntocinon)
- If you have had a previous Caesarean section
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Small or premature baby
- Breech presentation
- Twin pregnancy
- If you are having an epidural
- Overweight which you may hear referred to as raised BMI (Body Mass Index)

This list is not exhaustive, and you may also wish to request EFM.

## How is EFM done?

EFM involves monitoring your baby's heart rate, and also the frequency and duration (but not the strength) of your contractions.

This is usually done using two sensors placed over your 'bump' and held in place with elasticated straps. The sensors are then connected to a CTG machine. One sensor monitors your contractions and the other monitors your baby's heart beat. The machine prints out the patterns of your baby's heart beat and contractions.

Occasionally, if your baby is moving a lot, or if it is difficult to monitor your baby's heart, a small clip can be attached to the baby's scalp through your vagina. This will not hurt you or your baby but you may notice a small graze on your baby's scalp after birth.

If there are major concerns about the CTG, a further test to check how well your baby is coping with labour may also be advised.

This is called fetal blood sampling (FBS) and involves taking some blood from the baby's scalp. It may leave a small graze on your baby's head once born.

This test tells us whether your baby is coping well with the labour by measuring the amount of oxygen in your baby's blood.

You may also be offered immediate delivery either vaginally or by caesarean section.

Which of these you are offered will depend on your individual situation.

## Risks of EFM

EFM does increase the chance that you may need a caesarean section or a forceps delivery (although this could be influenced by the underlying reason for you being offered EFM).

Unfortunately, EFM does restrict your ability to move around in labour, and some women find the elasticated straps uncomfortable.

It does not guarantee a good outcome. For example it cannot predict an acute problem during labour such as an abruption. This is when the placenta separates from the womb prematurely.

## Benefits of EFM

Some people find EFM very reassuring. Both you and your partner will be able to see the printed CTG of your baby, and your midwife or doctor will be happy to explain your baby's heart beat to you.

For high risk pregnancies we can monitor your baby closely.

We believe that, for high-risk pregnancies, the advantages of EFM outweigh the disadvantages.

For low-risk, there is no benefit from more intensive monitoring compared to intermittent auscultation. Throughout labour we are constantly reassessing and making sure that you are still 'low-risk'.

## Sources of information

[www.rcog.org.uk](http://www.rcog.org.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

## Useful contacts

### **The Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital**

Northumbria Way

Cramlington

NE23 6NZ

Pregnancy Assessment Unit: 0191 607 2815

Birthing centre: 0191 607 2318

Ward 16: 0191 607 2016

### **Berwick Midwifery Led Unit**

High Green

Berwick-upon-Tweed

TD15 1LT

01289 356 622

### **Hexham Midwifery Led Unit**

Corbridge Road

Hexham

NE46 1QJ

01434 655 352

### **Hillcrest Midwifery Led Unit**

Infirmary Drive

Alnwick

NE66 2NS

01665 626 732



## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

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