

Pregnancy & your baby's movements

Hapūtanga me ngā nekehanga a tāu pēpi

Your pēpi (baby) will be active during your entire pregnancy. It can be very exciting to feel them move.

You will first start to feel your pēpi move when you are between 16 and 22 weeks pregnant. At first you will not feel movement very often. But as your pēpi grows, their movements will become obvious, and you will feel them more regularly.

You will not feel small movements such as thumb sucking or stretching of fingers and toes. You will feel kicking and rolling movements and perhaps hiccups (small rhythmic twitches) during the last trimester. All these movements are obvious in the last months of pregnancy, and you should feel them right up to the time you go into labour.

Usually, an active pēpi is a healthy pēpi. Some women may not feel their pēpi move as much as others, even though they are doing well. Larger women, or those whose placenta is at the front of their uterus may not feel their baby's movements as strongly.

When babies move

Pēpi do not move all the time, even when they are perfectly healthy. All healthy pēpi are quiet or asleep at times. Before birth, pēpi have similar sleep and wake cycles to those of a newborn pēpi. To better understand your baby's wake and sleep cycles, imagine a healthy toddler running around then having a regular daytime nap. This is normal behaviour. But if that toddler lay on the couch for a long time when they did not usually sleep, you would wonder if they were sick. Similarly, if your pēpi is quiet at a time when they are normally active, it may be cause for concern.

When they are awake, a healthy pēpi will usually move at least 10 times in 2 hours.

Your pēpi should be active during your entire pregnancy, including in the last few weeks. You may notice a change in the type of movements you feel in the last few weeks of your pregnancy as your pēpi has less room.





Feeling your pēpi move

Being aware of your baby's movements each day is a good habit to get into during pregnancy. You do not need to keep a written record of them, but you may want to.

From 28 weeks (third trimester) it is good to spend some time each day focusing on your baby's movements. Most pēpi move around more in the morning and evening.

When your pēpi is awake you can practise feeling for movements. You will feel them best when you relax while lying or sitting down. You will feel them least while standing or walking, or if you are busy with other things.

A change in the number, pattern, speed or strength of movements can mean there is something wrong with your pēpi.

Important

Call your midwife or lead maternity carer (LMC) the same day or night if you are concerned about a change in your baby's movements.

Your midwife or LMC can check your pēpi, including checking their heartbeat.

Usually everything will be OK, but it is always best to check.

Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed November 2024.