

Pregnancy & your baby's movements

Your baby will be active during your entire pregnancy – it can be very exciting to feel them move.

You will first start to feel your baby move when you're between 16 and 22 weeks pregnant. At first you won't feel movement very often, but as your baby grows, their movements will become obvious and you'll feel them more regularly.

You won't feel small movements such as thumb sucking or stretching of fingers and toes. You'll 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.



What do movements say about your baby's health?

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

How much should your baby move?

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

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

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

Do babies move less before labour?

There's no reason to believe that babies move less in the last few weeks before birth. Your baby should be active during your entire pregnancy.



Do healthy babies move all the time?

Babies don't move all the time, even when they're perfectly healthy. All healthy babies will be quiet or asleep at times. Before birth, babies have similar sleep and wake cycles to those of a newborn baby.

To better understand your baby's wake and sleep cycles, imagine a healthy toddler running around and then having a regular daytime nap. This is normal behaviour, but if that toddler lay on the couch for a long time when they didn't usually sleep, you would wonder if they were sick. Similarly, if your baby is quiet at a time when they're normally active, it may be cause for concern.

What do you do if you're concerned about your baby's movements?

Normal movements are a sign of a healthy baby – when a healthy baby is awake they'll usually move at least 10 times in two hours. If your baby has stopped moving as much, it may be a cause for concern.

If you're worried about your baby's movements, sit in a quiet place and focus on what you can feel. If you're still worried, contact your midwife or LMC immediately. Never wait until the next day.

Most of the time, your midwife or LMC will check your baby's heartbeat, and tell you that your baby's tests are normal.

Important

If you have any concerns at all about your baby's movements, call your midwife or LMC immediately.

When should I contact my midwife or LMC?

You should contact your midwife or LMC if:

- your baby doesn't move at all one day. If this happens, contact your midwife or LMC that very day or night. Don't wait until the next day
- your baby kicks less and less during one day and you feel that there's too little activity.

If you have any questions about your baby's movements, ask your obstetrician, midwife or LMC.

Written by Australia and New Zealand Stillbirth Alliance (ANZSA). Adapted by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Endorsed by midwife liaison, Canterbury DHB. Last reviewed June 2018.