

Pregnancy & your baby's movements

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

You'll first start to feel your pēpi move when you're between 16 and 22 weeks pregnant. At first you won't feel movement very often, but as your pēpi 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.

Usually, an active pēpi is a healthy pēpi. Some women may not feel their pēpi move as much as others, even though they're 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 (babies) don't move all the time, even when they're 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 didn't usually sleep, you would wonder if they were sick.

Similarly, if your pēpi is quiet at a time when they're normally active, it may be cause for concern.

When they're awake, a healthy pēpi will usually move at least 10 times in two 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 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 pēpi move around more in the morning and evening.

When your pēpi 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 or walking, or if you're busy with other things.

If you're concerned about your baby's movements

Important

Call your midwife or LMC the same day or night if:

- your pēpi doesn't move all day
- your pēpi moves less and less during the day
- you're concerned that your pēpi isn't moving enough.

Normal movements are a sign of a healthy pēpi. If your pēpi 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.

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. Last reviewed December 2021.