



York Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Fetal monitoring in labour

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Maternity Services

York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

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① For more information, please contact your own midwife

Caring with pride

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Introduction

You have been given this leaflet to inform you about how we listen to your baby's heart rate during labour. Most babies come through labour without any problems but there are a few babies who will run into difficulties. The best way of finding out which babies are having problems is to listen to every baby's heartbeat regularly throughout labour.

Why do you need to listen to my baby's heart rate?

The normal range for the baby's heart rate is between 110 and 160 beats over a minute, although this can be higher or lower without meaning that the baby is in difficulty. The variation in the baby's heart rate may be caused by the womb contracting which reduces the blood flow to the placenta (afterbirth), meaning that your baby may get less oxygen than usual. This is normal and most babies cope without any difficulty. The effect of the reduced oxygen may show in changes to the baby's heart rate. Where these changes fall within a certain pattern, it could mean that the baby is not coping so well and you may be advised that your baby needs a further test or to be born as soon as possible.

How will we listen to your baby's heartbeat?

You will have your baby's heart rate listened to throughout your pregnancy by your midwife with either a **Pinard's stethoscope** or a **hand held Doppler**. In labour, the same equipment is likely to be used if your pregnancy is considered low risk.

When labour is established your baby's heartbeat will be listened to at least every 15 minutes and then much more frequently as you get nearer the birth.

Sometimes it is necessary to monitor the baby's heart rate continuously throughout labour. This is done using an **electronic fetal monitoring machine** (cardio tocograph or CTG) this produces a paper printout and is only used in the hospital. This works by having two transducers held in place by two elastic belts on your tummy. One is placed on the top of your uterus, which picks up the frequency of the contractions. The second transducer is positioned on your tummy in the best place to listen to your baby's heart rate. The information from these two transducers is printed out onto paper, which midwives and doctors can assess.

The CTG machine has a visual display where you can see and hear the heart rate. Sometimes the sound of the heartbeat is lost, this can be worrying but it is usually loss of contact between the machine and the baby, and does not necessarily mean there is a problem. If this happens, it may be necessary to pick the baby's heart rate up using a fetal scalp electrode, called a FSE.

The FSE electrode is a small clip at the end of a thin wire that is attached directly to the baby's head during an internal examination. It usually stays in place until the baby is born, the baby may have a small mark resulting from the clip, which should heal and disappear after a few days.

If you would like to know more about monitoring your baby's heart rate in labour, please speak to your midwife or doctor.

What are the risks of fetal heart monitoring?

There are no known risks to the health of you or your baby from the monitoring.

Being attached to the monitor for continuous CTG may limit your ability to move. Whilst you may be able to sit down or stand up, you will only be able to walk two or three paces backwards and forwards. In York there are two wireless CTG monitors and one in Scarborough which you may use if not already in use. This will allow you to move freely within the delivery room and can also be used in the birthing pool.

What are the benefits of fetal heart monitoring?

The best way of finding out which babies are having problems in labour is to listen to every baby's heart beat regularly throughout labour – so if a problem is identified, further action can be taken to help your baby to be born healthily.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:
Maternity Services Patient Information Group,
c/o Patient Leaflet Team, Healthcare Governance, 98
Union Terrace, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York,
YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 721045 or 725230 or email
us at patient.information2@york.nhs.uk.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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email: access@york.nhs.uk



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Large print



Electronic

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