

the
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh
choice

Surgical Division

Obstetrics & Gynaecology

Information for patients about

Methods of Listening to your baby's heartbeat during Labour

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**Our patients
are at the heart
of everything we do**

LISTENING TO YOUR BABY'S HEARTBEAT

Patients Advice Sheet

Throughout your labour a midwife will be listening to your baby's heartbeat at regular intervals. Your baby's heart rate and its response to your contractions will be recorded in order to assess your baby's well-being during labour.

How is this done?

Different equipment can be used to listen to a baby's heartbeat – you will have become familiar with some of them during the antenatal period.

Pinards

This is a plastic hand-held instrument shaped like a small trumpet, which the midwife places on your abdomen and listens to your baby's heartbeat through. The heartbeat is usually recorded over a period of one minute on each monitoring occasion. Your baby's heartbeat can be monitored in this way throughout your labour, providing there have been no problems during your antenatal period and no complications arise during labour.

Handheld Doppler

This is a small battery operated ultrasound machine, which enables the midwife and yourself to hear the baby's heartbeat. If you are considering a water birth, a specially adapted waterproof Doppler Machine can be used for monitoring during labour.

Electronic Fetal Monitoring

This is carried out using a larger machine and enables your baby's heartbeat to be recorded over a period of time. During this type of monitoring, two receivers will be placed on your abdomen and held in place by belts. One will record your baby's heartbeat and the other will record your contractions. This helps to assess how your baby is responding to your contractions.

During a contraction the blood supply to your placenta is temporarily reduced which results in a short reduction of oxygen to the baby. This is a normal process to which babies usually adapt without any problems. Occasionally a baby may not be receiving enough oxygen and will begin to show signs of distress. It is important to have a clear recording of the baby's heartbeat in these circumstances.

A midwife or doctor will ask your permission to apply a small clip to your baby's head (known as a Fetal Scalp Electrode). This procedure is performed

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during a vaginal examination – your waters will be broken at the same time unless this has already occurred. The external end of the electrode will be secured to your thigh using a small lead, which is attached to the external monitor. During labour your pulse rate can rise for various reasons. A Fetal Scalp Electrode helps to ensure that the mother's heartbeat is not mistakenly recorded as the baby's heart beat.

How often is the baby's heartbeat monitored?

When you arrive at the labour ward a midwife will discuss your birth plan and share information with you regarding the management of your labour enabling you to make informed choices.

Women are usually identified as being in a 'low risk' or 'high risk' category in relation to care given in labour. Various factors influence which category you will come into, e.g. past medical history, antenatal events etc.

Your 'risk factor' will be reflected in the type of fetal monitoring performed during labour.

Should you be defined as 'low risk' the midwife will monitor your baby's heartbeat at regular intervals using a Pinard's stethoscope or hand held Doppler machine.

Your baby's heartbeat will usually be recorded at approximately 15-minute intervals during the 1st stage of labour and after each contraction during the 2nd (pushing) stage.

If any problems occur it may be necessary to revert back to electronic monitoring, but your midwife will discuss all aspects of your care with you.

Should you be defined as 'high risk' a continuous recording of your baby's heartbeat, on admission in labour will be performed using an electronic fetal monitor and usually takes between 20-30 minutes. It provides yourself and your caregivers with baseline information about your baby's heartbeat, which can be referred to as your labour progresses.

If you have any further questions regarding the monitoring of your baby's heartbeat please feel happy to discuss them with your midwife.

Delivery Suite	-	01942 778505
Antenatal Clinic Thomas Linacre Centre	-	01942 774700
Antenatal Clinic Leigh	-	01942 264242

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Research is done, to add to the existing scientific knowledge on a particular subject. There are a number of staff, within the Trust who conduct research studies*. It is possible, that during the course of your treatment you may be asked to take part in a research study, however, you DO have the right to refuse and this WILL NOT affect the care that you receive

[See the Nat.Research Reg.](#)

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PALS-Patient Advice and Liaison service

The Pals are able to provide 'on the spot' help and advice to patients, carers, friends and families. We will listen to you and provide you with relevant information and support to help resolve any concerns or problems you may have, that you do not wish to discuss with a member of staff, as quickly and efficiently and confidentially as possible.

If you have a concern, or need help or information you can contact the PALS service and we will do our best to help you. We can be contacted Monday to Friday between 9:00am and 4.00pm on 01942 823340. Outside these hours there is an answerphone service available.

Alternatively, we can be contacted by bleep. Just ring the switchboard on the main Wigan Hospital number (01942 244000) and ask them to bleep us on 2376

If we are unable to allay your concerns and you feel you would like to take your complaint further, you can write to:

The Complaints Manager
Wrightington, Wigan & Leigh NHS Trust
Wigan Infirmary
Wigan Lane
Wigan WN1 2NN
Tel 01942 823340