

## Patient information

### Foetal movement

All pregnant women are invited to a routine appointment at the antenatal clinic around week 24 of their pregnancy.

All receive information about foetal movement at this appointment.

The information aims to make pregnant women aware of the foetus's pattern of movements, in order to encourage them, if necessary, to contact the antenatal clinic during daytime hours or the maternity unit during the evening and at the weekend, if the movements become less frequent or weaker. There should be renewed contact in the event of repeated reduced foetal movement.

Just as newborn babies are all different, there are also differences in how much foetuses move. Some are very active in the womb, while others are less so. However, all foetuses move right up until birth. Each foetus has its own pattern of movements and has periods of wakefulness with a lot of movement and periods of rest of approx. 20-40 minutes (rarely more than 90 minutes) when the foetus is still. During the later stages of pregnancy, the foetus will frequently sleep for periods throughout the day, and most foetuses have a circadian rhythm where they are most active during the evening. The number of movements usually reaches a peak around week 32 of pregnancy and then largely remains unchanged until the birth. There is nothing to suggest that the movements decrease towards the end of pregnancy, but the nature of the movements may feel different compared with earlier on in the pregnancy.

The movements of a foetus can be divided into two main groups: large movements and small movements. The large movements are felt clearly, when the foetus kicks, stretches or turns from side to side, for example. The small movements, which are not felt, occur when the foetus sucks its thumb, curls its fingers and toes, and makes breathing movements. With each week, the foetus grows and the movements become stronger.

During the final months of pregnancy, most women experience clear movements and describe them as vigorous. At full term, foetal movements are often described as strong pushes, compared with the kicks felt previously. As the foetus has less space to move around, some women experience a feeling as though the foetus is trying to stretch. Others describe experiencing big movements that involve the foetus's whole body and that feel slower than before. At the end of pregnancy, women also describe movements that feel as though the child is moving from side to side.

There can be a big difference from one foetus to another in how frequent and how strong movements are. If the movements become weaker or less frequent and deviate from the foetus's normal way of moving, it may be a sign that the foetus is not happy in the womb. The vast majority of women who experience reduced and weaker movements give birth to a healthy, happy child.