



Fetal Heart Rate Monitoring

Your doctor may want to monitor your baby's heart rate during labor and delivery. Monitoring the heart rate provides valuable information about how your baby is doing during the birth process. A heart rate that is too high or too low alerts your doctor to possible problems. Some doctors monitor only high-risk pregnancies. Other doctors monitor all pregnancies.

There are two types of heart rate monitoring devices: auscultation and electronic. Auscultation devices are hand held and used to listen to the heart rate intermittently. Electronic devices are used to monitor the heart rate continuously.

Auscultation Devices

- The **fetoscope** is similar to a stethoscope. One end is placed on the mother's abdomen and the "listening" end is placed in the ears of the doctor or nurse.
- A **Doppler** is an ultrasound device that can transmit the heartbeat either into earpieces or over a speaker.

Electronic Devices

- **External** monitoring is done with a pair of belts that are wrapped around the mother's abdomen. One belt detects the fetal heartbeat. The other belt monitors the mother's contractions.
- **Internal** monitoring involves placing a small electrode on the baby's scalp. This electrode provides a constant report of the baby's heartbeat. Uterine contractions can also be measured with an internal device. Internal monitoring can be done only after the bag of waters breaks (or is broken by the doctor) and the cervix has dilated to 2 or 3 centimeters.
- **Telemetry** monitoring transmits the baby's heart rate to the nurse's station by means of radio waves. A transmitter is connected to the mother's thigh, allowing her to remain mobile during monitoring.

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