

# Fetal Monitoring During Labor

You have waited nine months to meet your baby and now the big day is here! You are in labor and preparing to deliver your baby. During labor, your doctor will monitor your baby to see how she is handling labor to ensure your baby is healthy and safe. Your baby's heart rate will be monitored using small monitoring belts placed on your belly.

This procedure is called Electronic Fetal Monitoring, or EFM. Electronic Fetal Monitoring records your baby's heartbeat and your contractions during labor.

*"Electronic fetal monitoring is really important for us because it is our one way to know baby is doing well. We watch your contractions you can tell us when you are having pain. We can see if you are having bleeding, but we have no way for baby to tell us how they're doing. And labor can be really stressful for baby. Contractions can really compromise the placenta and the placenta is baby's source of blood and oxygen."*

Electronic Fetal monitoring can be external, internal or both. With external monitoring, a pair of belts is wrapped around your abdomen. One belt uses a device called a Doppler Transducer to detect your baby's heartbeat. The other belt measures the length of contractions and the time between them. Some hospitals and birth centers have wireless forms of these monitors so that you can walk around the labor unit freely during your labor, and still have your baby monitored.

After your Cervix is dilated, your doctor may also attach an internal monitor to keep track of your baby's heart rate. An electrode will be inserted through your cervix and attached via a small clip to your baby's head. Once your baby is born, the electrode will be removed.

Sometimes your baby's heart is monitored continuously, meaning your baby's heart is monitored during your entire labor. Or intermittently, meaning your baby's heart is monitored every 15 to 30 minutes, and more frequently when you are pushing.

If your baby has an abnormal heart rate, it could be a sign your baby's health is at risk. In some cases, your baby may not be getting enough oxygen during labor. Too little oxygen can lead to an abnormal heart rate pattern. To help your baby get more oxygen, your doctor may recommend you change position during labor. If this does not work or further tests show your baby is still having a problem, delivering your baby by Cesarean Section may be necessary.

During labor your healthcare team will do all they can to ensure a safe and healthy delivery. Electronic Fetal Monitoring is an important tool to help monitor your baby's heart rate. If you have questions or concerns about fetal monitoring, contact your healthcare provider and ask questions before you go into labor, so you know what to expect on the day your baby arrives.