

Irregular Baby Heartbeat

What is an irregular fetal heart beat?

Occasionally when your midwife listens to your baby's heartbeat she may hear an irregular beat or rhythm. This is commonly caused by extra beats. These beats are called ectopic beats, which are of no significance to your baby and are caused by the heart's immaturity.

Why do they occur?

A small area of baby's heart sends out electrical impulses, which regulate a normal heart rate. These impulses spread throughout the heart muscle and cause it to contract in a regular rhythm.

However, sometimes another area of the heart sends out an extra electrical impulse, which will cause an extra heartbeat. The heart then rests while the heart muscle gets back to a normal rhythm. This can make your baby's heart sound irregular.

An irregular heartbeat is not associated with any abnormalities in the way a baby's heart is formed. We would expect it to settle as pregnancy progresses but it occasionally persists until birth.

What will happen during my pregnancy?

Your midwife will listen to your baby's heart rate when you attend for your antenatal appointments. It is very rare but occasionally your baby's heartbeat may develop a continuous fast rhythm. This is called tachycardia*.

Cutting down on your intake of tea, coffee and Coca-Cola is advisable. The caffeine content in these drinks can stimulate the electrical activity of the baby's heart.

What will happen when baby is born?

This is usually a condition that has no significance for baby in future life. The paediatrician will listen to your baby's heartbeat before you are discharged from hospital and perform further tests if necessary.

**If your baby's heart beat remains at a fast rhythm for a long period of time it could rarely damage baby's heart or other organs. Your obstetrician may recommend medicine for you to take to help regulate your baby's heart beat but this is very rare.*

