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Fetal movement counting reduces maternal anxiety: Study



When a pregnant woman notes a decrease in the frequency or intensity of fetal movements it's a possible indication that her baby is running into difficulty.

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By **Ann Douglas**

Living columnist

Pregnant women who monitor their babies' movements via fetal movement counting during the third trimester tend to be less anxious about their babies' wellbeing than other pregnant women.

That's the key finding from a study conducted by researchers from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health in Oslo, Norway. The study ("Fetal Movement Counting: Maternal Concern and

Experience: A Multi-Centre, Randomized Controlled Trial”) was published in the March 2012 issue of the journal [Birth](#).

Fetal movement counting allows a pregnant woman to tune into her baby’s movements in the hope that she can pick up on either a decrease in the frequency or the intensity of those movements — a possible indication that baby is running into difficulty. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada’s Clinical Practice Guidelines on Antenatal Fetal Assessment suggest [possible methods](#) of kick counting: the Cardiff method, which involves counting 10 movements over a 12-hour period; and the Sandoff method, which involves counting four movements during a one-hour period.

Of course, not every pregnant woman has to devote a lot of time to fetal movement counting. Take Leah Masters of Waterloo, who is expecting her first baby later this month, as an example. “This baby is constantly moving!” she says.

How a woman feels about fetal movement counting is largely determined by how her caregiver explains fetal movements to her, says Lisa Weston, president of the [Association of Ontario Midwives](#) and a midwife at [Sages-Femmes Rouge Valley Midwives](#) in Scarborough, Ontario. “When I talk to women, we talk fairly early on in the pregnancy about when it’s normal to start feeling movement and what can affect the amount of movement that is felt.” Being on the run all day can make it more difficult to detect a baby’s movements, for example. Likewise, if the placenta is positioned in such a way that it is buffering the baby’s movements, that will reduce the amount of movement a mother feels, Weston explains.

Weston also makes a point of debunking a common and dangerous myth about fetal movement: that babies stop moving right before their mothers go into labour. “That’s simply not true,”

Weston insists. If a woman detects a sudden decrease in the amount or the intensity of her baby's movements, she should get in touch with her caregiver right away. "It's easy for us to check on babies." As for the guilt some women feel about bothering their caregivers? Forget about it. Your caregiver is counting on you to pick up that phone and call if you have any concerns about your baby's wellbeing. As Weston explains, "You know more about your baby on a day-to-day basis than we do."

Like Weston, the Norwegian researchers sought to demonstrate that the pregnant woman is the true expert when it comes to monitoring her baby's day-to-day health.

"Through formal fetal movement counting the mother becomes an expert in observing the normal quality and quantity of the activity, which in turn may increase the confidence of her own assessments [of her baby's wellbeing]," the researchers noted.

It's a message that [Count the Kicks](#), an Iowa-based fetal movement counting campaign that originated with five Iowa mothers who each lost daughters to late-term infant death or stillbirth, has been spreading since 2005. The campaign believes that fetal movement counting can make a world of difference for mothers and their babies.

"We continue to hear stories about babies that have been saved because of kick counting," says Count the Kicks co-founder Kate Safris. "We've heard from at least ten moms who have told us, 'My provider said this is what saved my baby.'"

Ann Douglas is the author of [The Mother of All Pregnancy Books](#). Her website is www.having-a-baby.com.