

# Warning: use of home fetal Doppler devices during pregnancy

**The Stillbirth Centre of Research Excellence strongly advises against the use of hand-held fetal heart monitoring devices ('fetal Dopplers') at home.**

**These devices may provide false reassurance that the baby is well and lead to a life-threatening delay in seeking appropriate care from maternity health care professionals.**

## Background

Hand-held fetal Dopplers are widely available and pregnant women are using these devices to listen to their baby's heartbeat at home. Without correct training, the maternal pulse can be easily misinterpreted as the fetal heartbeat. Even the correct identification of a fetal heartbeat is not a reliable determinant of a baby's health and well-being.

**There is no evidence demonstrating that the use of fetal Dopplers at home reduces the risk of stillbirth.**

## Advice for pregnant women

The Stillbirth Centre of Research Excellence strongly recommends that pregnant women do not purchase or use fetal Dopplers to detect their baby's heartbeat at home. Women who are concerned about their baby's health should seek urgent advice from their maternity healthcare professional. You are not wasting their time.

Remember that every pregnancy is unique, and the chance of stillbirth is very low. However, it is important to be informed and take measures to reduce your risk. Speak with your doctor or midwife about how to have a safe and healthy pregnancy.

Alternative ways to bond and connect with your baby, and relieve any anxiety about your baby's wellbeing include: journaling, speaking/singing/reading to baby, taking photos of your bump and taking time to slow down and tune into baby's movements.

Things you can do to reduce your risk of stillbirth include:

- For women who smoke, seek help to stop as soon as possible
- Attend all appointments to monitor your health and your baby's growth
- Be aware of your baby's movements and let your health professionals know if your baby's movements stop or slow down
- Go to sleep on your side from 28 weeks onwards
- Getting the balance right between benefits and risks is really important when deciding on timing of birth

To access more translated information and videos go to [saferbaby.org.au](https://saferbaby.org.au)

## Advice for maternity healthcare professionals

The Stillbirth Centre of Research Excellence strongly supports maternity healthcare professionals advising pregnant women (and their partners) against using home fetal Dopplers.

All pregnant women should be routinely provided with verbal and written information about how to have a safe pregnancy, including information about fetal movements by 28 weeks' gestation. Women should be advised that it is normal to perceive increasingly strong movements as pregnancy progresses, episodes of movements that are more vigorous than usual, occasional fetal hiccups, and a diurnal pattern involving strong fetal movement in the evening. Resources for women and maternity healthcare professionals to help support this discussion are available at [learn.stillbirthcre.org.au](https://learn.stillbirthcre.org.au)

Women should be encouraged to find alternative ways to connect and bond with their baby rather than use of at home Doppler. Strategies may include: journaling about their pregnancy, speaking/singing/reading to baby, taking photos of their bump and taking time to slow down and tune into their baby's movements.

Maternity healthcare professionals should remind women at each scheduled and unscheduled antenatal visit after 28 weeks' gestation of the importance of maternal awareness of fetal movements and to report concerns of a decrease in strength, and/or frequency or a non-diurnal pattern of movements.

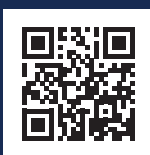
All women who contact their maternity healthcare professional with a concern about fetal movements should be invited to the health service for immediate assessment.

Presentation to the health service should not be delayed through efforts to stimulate the baby with food or drink, or by requesting women to phone back after a period of concentrating on fetal movements.

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### More information

The vision of the Stillbirth Centre of Research Excellence is to reduce the devastating impact of stillbirth for women, families and the wider community in Australia and across the globe by improving care to reduce the number of stillborn babies and to reduce the impact of this loss. For more information, please refer to [stillbirthcre.org.au](https://stillbirthcre.org.au)



Parents - For more information about Safer Baby and to access the resources for parents go to [Saferbaby.org.au](https://Saferbaby.org.au)



For more information about the Safer Baby Bundle program and to access the elearning resources for health care professionals go to [learn.stillbirthcre.org.au](https://learn.stillbirthcre.org.au)