



## Patient Information

# Causes of an Irregular Heartbeat in the Fetus

There are different causes for the heartbeat of an unborn baby to sound irregular and in most cases it does not matter at all. Usually it is just part of the normal development of the conducting tissue of the heart, and in spite of the irregular beat the heart is pumping well and fulfilling all its duties.

It is very unusual for this to be caused by an abnormality in the heart or for it to cause any problems. It virtually always settles down on its own, usually during pregnancy, although in some cases it can take a few weeks. Very occasionally the irregularity of the rhythm continues after birth, but even then is unlikely to cause any problems or need treatment, and usually becomes regular within a few weeks or months.

The cause of the irregular heartbeat is an extra focus of excitement within the atria (receiving chambers of the heart) which results in the ventricles (pumping chambers of the heart) contracting either early, causing an early beat, or late, causing a pause; these extra beats are caused atrial ectopic beats.

But the heart is still working efficiently.

The disadvantages of an irregular heartbeat include:

- Sounding unusual and therefore worrying
- Making it harder to monitor fetal wellbeing during labour (if still present)
- Very occasionally progressing into a fast heart rate which might need a cardiac scan or treatment.

**An irregular heartbeat is a common finding. In nearly all cases it is just part of the normal development of the heart and will settle spontaneously without needing treatment.**

Your midwife will be happy to discuss this with you and will know whether a more detailed assessment is appropriate



# Causes of an Irregular Heartbeat in the Fetus

From 1st January 2019 smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

**This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email [gwh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:gwh.pals@nhs.net)**

**Document Control**

Division: Women & Children's  
Department: Maternity  
Approved Date: 11 July 2019  
Next Review Date: August 2022  
Document Number W&C - PIL0072