



Media Release

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Mothers miss fetal movements

Pregnant women detect only about 36 per cent of movements made by their unborn children, according to a joint Victorian and Queensland study.

Dr Christine East, a midwife and clinical researcher at the Pregnancy Research Centre, Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne said previous studies had suggested that mothers feel up to 88 per cent of fetal movements.

The new findings were obtained through ultrasound scans, taken for research into fetal movement. They involved 14 women, between 32 and 39 weeks pregnant, who were attending an antenatal clinic at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital.

On average, the women detected only 35.8 per cent of movements – even those movements which registered as quite large or vigorous on the scans.

“We know it is very common, when conducting ultrasounds, that a lot of fetal movements we can see are not felt by the mother. But this result shows us that much more movement than we thought goes unnoticed,” Dr East said.

Possible reasons can include the position of the baby when it moves and maternal obesity. Four of the women in the study had a BMI over 30.

“We know that fetal movement, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy, is a very good indicator of the development and overall health of the developing foetus.

“So this study may inform future studies of the importance of fetal movement, and also help us to improve women's perceptions of fetal movements.

“If a pregnant woman detects a change in fetal movements, or notices that they diminish, she should contact her doctor or midwife immediately,” Dr East said.

This latest exploratory study complements an ongoing longitudinal study by the two hospitals into fetal movements.

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