

What is a Non-Stress Test for Pregnancy?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is a Non-Stress Test

A non-stress test is a safe and painless test performed to check on your baby's well-being. It is usually performed in the third trimester of pregnancy. At Greenwich Hospital, this test is performed by a registered nurse in the Labor & Delivery unit.

Why would a non-stress test be performed?

Some women need to have their babies watched more closely than others for various reasons. These reasons may include high risk conditions such as:

- Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure
- Pre-eclampsia
- Multiple gestation

Other reasons to have the test performed may include:

- Low amniotic fluid
- Changes in baby's growth rate
- Changes in baby's movement
- When a woman goes beyond her expected due date.

Are there any specific instructions to follow before the test?

- There are no dietary restrictions or preparations prior to the test.
- The nurse will ask you to empty your bladder prior to the test so that you are more comfortable.

How is a non-stress test performed?

- Two elastic belts with small monitors attached are placed around your abdomen. They are connected to a larger electronic fetal monitor at the bedside.
- One monitor sends and receives ultrasound waves to and from your baby that listens and records your baby's heart rate. Sometimes the baby's heart rate cannot be heard due to your baby moving out of the range of the ultrasound waves. Do not become alarmed, notify your nurse and she will adjust the monitor.
- The other monitor picks up and records any contractions you may have.

- The jelly that is placed under the external monitors is the same used for ultrasounds, and may be cold.
- During the testing, your baby's heart rate and the presence of any contractions are recorded on special paper called a tracing or strip.
- The nurse may give you a button to push each time you feel the baby move.
- The test generally takes 20 to 60 minutes. Additional testing time may be necessary depending upon your individual needs.
- Sometimes, the testing may occur during the baby's sleep cycle, when there is little fetal movement. The nurse may give you something cold to drink which may help to stimulate the baby to move.
- The nurse may also try to encourage fetal movement by using a fetal acoustic stimulator which sends sounds to the fetus through the mother's abdomen. This will not harm your baby and may help a sleepy baby become more active.
- Several non-stress tests may need to be done to show the baby's well-being over time.

What are the results of the non-stress test?

Test results are available immediately. The results are reported to you and your doctor by the nurse performing the test prior to you leaving the hospital.

Reactive: The baby's heart rate increases in response to fetal movement meeting specific criteria. This is a reassuring sign that the baby and placenta are doing well.

Non-reactive: The baby's heart rate does not increase in response to fetal movement. This is not a cause for alarm. Healthy babies sometimes have non-reactive tests. Your doctor may order more tests and monitoring such as an ultrasound.

Are there any risks associated with this test?

There are no risks to you or your baby from this test. If you have any questions, ask to speak with your nurse or doctor.

Sources: American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists @ www.acog.org Retrieved March 2006.
University of Iowa Health Care @ <http://obgyn.ujhc.uiowa.edu> Retrieved March 2006.

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education