

## Patient Information Leaflet

### Ectopic or Irregular Fetal Heartbeat

We have scanned your baby's heart and found that there is no abnormality of the structure or function of the heart.

#### What is an irregular fetal heartbeat?

Occasionally when your midwife listens to your baby's heartbeat she may hear an irregular beat or rhythm. This is commonly caused by extra beats. These beats are called ectopic beats, which are of no significance to your baby and are caused by the hearts immaturity.

#### Why do they occur?

A small area of baby's heart sends out electrical impulses, which regulate a normal heart rate. These impulses spread throughout the heart muscle and cause it to contract in a regular rhythm. However, sometimes another area of the heart sends out an extra electrical impulse, which will cause an extra heartbeat. The heart then rests while the heart muscle gets back to a normal rhythm. This can make your baby's heart sound irregular. An irregular heartbeat is not associated with any abnormalities in the way a baby's heart is formed. We would expect it to settle as pregnancy progresses, but it occasionally persists until birth.

#### What will happen during my pregnancy?

Your midwife will listen to your baby's heart rate when you attend for your antenatal appointments. You will also be scanned weekly whilst the ectopic beat or irregularity is noted. It is very rare but occasionally your baby's heartbeat may develop a continuous fast rhythm. This is called tachycardia\*.

**Cutting down on your intake of tea, coffee and Cola/energy drinks is advisable. The caffeine content in these drinks can stimulate the electrical activity of the baby's heart. You can also reduce your intake of chocolate and vanilla. Some medications can contribute to the heartbeat such as salbutamol for asthma. We also advise you avoid undue stress and smoking.**



No  
smoking



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## **What will happen when baby is born?**

This is usually a condition that has no significance for baby in future life. The paediatrician will listen to your baby's heartbeat before you are discharged from hospital and perform further tests if necessary. \*If your baby's heartbeat remains at a fast rhythm for a long period of time it could rarely damage baby's heart or other organs. Your obstetrician may recommend a referral to a fetal medicine specialist if this occurs.

## **What else do I need to do?**

You will be advised to keep an eye on the pattern of your baby's movements and if you are concerned to contact the hospital. Also, please refer to our fetal movement leaflet.