

Non-Stress Test

What is a non-stress test?

A non-stress test (NST) is done to check the wellbeing of your baby. A NST measures the heart rate and activity of your baby. The test can show your health care provider if the placenta is providing enough oxygen for your baby, and help in making decisions about your care.

Why do you need to have this test?

Your provider will talk to you about the reason for your NST. Some reasons include having gestational diabetes, an overdue baby, past pregnancies with problems, high blood pressure, or bleeding during the last part of your pregnancy. Your provider will let you know how often you should have this test.

How is the test done?

For the test, you will lie down on a bed. A nurse will place a fetal monitor on your belly. The fetal monitor is attached to a machine that picks up the baby's heart beat and activity or the contractions of your uterus. You will push a button every time the baby moves. This information will be printed on a moving strip of paper that you can watch.

How is the test interpreted?

Normally, your baby will move at least 2 times within 20 minutes. The baby's heart rate should get faster in response to these movements. We call this a reactive test. This result means the baby is in a healthy environment. Your provider might suggest another NST if needed.

If your baby doesn't move or the heart beat doesn't go up (a non-reactive test), or if any part of your test is abnormal, we will talk with your provider or one of the obstetricians in our department. They will decide what to do; most often this involves further testing.

Over 90 % of NSTs are normal and give us reassurance that all is well with your baby. When a NST shows a possible problem, it helps your provider make decisions about the time of your delivery.

How is the test scheduled and where is it done?

When your provider orders a NST, you or a nurse will schedule the test with the Perinatal Coordinators. Please be on time for your appointment and allow 1 hour for the test. You can have a support person with you. Eat or drink a healthy snack before coming to your appointment, as babies tend to be more active after meals. You won't be able to move around during the test. If you bring small children with you, bring someone to care for them while you have the test. If you smoke, don't smoke 2 hours before the test - smoking affects the baby's heart rate and decreases the baby's movements.

The NST is done in the Capitol Hill North Building. Check in on the 1st floor and you will be directed to Maternal/Fetal Testing. If you have any questions or concerns, please talk with your provider or nurse.