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Antepartum Fetal Heart Rate Testing Non-Stress test (NST)

1. What is a non-stress test (NST)?

A non-stress test is a safe and painless test performed in the clinic or the hospital to check on your baby's well-being. A NST can help reassure you and your provider that all is well with your baby by monitoring for fetal movements and fetal heart rate.

2. Why is a non-stress test (NST) performed?

There are many reasons why a non-stress test is performed. These reasons include diabetes, high blood pressure, twins, changes in baby's movement, increased or decreased amniotic fluid, growth restriction in the baby, women who will be 37 years old or older at delivery, and when a woman goes beyond her expected due date. The non-stress test is performed to make sure the baby has a healthy environment and is getting enough oxygen from the placenta.

3. How is a non-stress test (NST) performed?

Two elastic belts with small monitors are attached and placed snugly around your abdomen. They are connected to a portable electronic fetal monitor.

One monitor records your baby's heart rate and the other monitor picks up and records any contractions you might have. You will also be given a button to press each time the baby moves. The baby's heart rate, movement and any contractions will all print out on a strip of paper.

Sometimes the testing may occur during the baby's sleep cycle when there is little movement. This is a good time to eat a cold drink and snack which can stimulate the baby to wake up and move for the test.

Sometimes, the baby's heart rate cannot be heard because your baby moves out of range of the monitor.

Please don't worry, we can adjust the monitor to trace the heart rate.

The test generally takes 30-40 minutes to perform.

4. What are the results of the non-stress test (NST)?

Reactive NST: 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 at the time of the NST and predicts fetal well-being over the next couple of days.

Non-reactive NST: The baby's heart rate does not increase in response to fetal movement. Although healthy babies sometimes have non-reactive tests, this indicates that more tests and further monitoring may be necessary.

5. Are there any risks associated with this test?

There are no risks to you or your baby from this test. Please ask us if you have any further questions.

6. How do I schedule a non-stress test (NST)?

NSTs are usually done twice weekly to monitor the baby's well-being. At Maitri, NSTs are done on Mondays/Thursdays or Tuesdays/Fridays. Please be sure to schedule your next week's NSTs each time before you leave.

7. Are there any specific instructions to follow before the test?

You should eat a full breakfast or lunch on the day of your NST. If it has been more than 2 hours since your last meal, have a healthy snack before you come in. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids as well. We do have some granola bars, juice and water in the clinic if you forget to bring a snack from home.