

Pregnant bellies: Updating the tape measure technique

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A new customised chart can provide better information about a growing fetus.

A new way of interpreting information from a low-tech, age-old method used in pregnancy care is expected to more accurately identify potential

health issues for mothers and babies.

Dr Kristen Gibbons from The University of Queensland's School of [Population Health](#) and Mater Research has developed a statistical chart that generates more detail from the traditional method of monitoring baby growth by measuring the mother's belly.

"We have developed a customised foetal growth chart that complements the symphyseal fundal height measurement – that is, the measurement of a pregnant woman's uterus," Dr Gibbons said.

Doctors and health professionals have used the tape measure technique for more than a century to look for indicators on [fetal growth](#), multiple gestation, amniotic fluid disorders and birth date prediction.

"Our customised chart is generated using characteristics specific to each pregnancy, including the mother's age, height, [body mass index](#), whether it is her first pregnancy and, if known, the baby's sex," Dr Gibbons said.

The technique would give more precision in identifying unusual growth rates, and thereby potential health problems.

"The charts could be particularly useful in rural and remote areas where there is not easy access to advanced [monitoring technology](#) that can be used to assess the wellbeing of a baby," Dr Gibbons said.

"We are implementing a [randomised controlled trial](#) at the Mater Mothers' Hospital in Brisbane to test our chart against Queensland Health's current non-customised one."

Clinicians at Mater Mothers' and at Ipswich Hospital have developed and tested an [interactive website](#) where details about the mother, baby and circumstances can be entered to generate the new personalised charts.

"If the trial results are positive, the website may provide an easy, low-cost improvement to a traditional and reliable antenatal care technique," Dr Gibbons said.

Provided by University of Queensland

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