

# ALIVE & KICKING... AND FEELING PAIN

## /facts about foetal pain










**'If the fetus is beyond 20 weeks of gestation, I would assume that there will be pain caused to the fetus. And I believe it will be severe and excruciating pain.'** Internationally renowned pain expert, **Dr K.J.S. ANAND**, commenting on pain felt during abortion, *New York Times Magazine*, February 2008.

According to the leading experts in the field, an unborn baby certainly feels pain at 20 weeks' gestation. Yet the ability of the child in the womb to experience pain is denied by abortion advocates.



DR KJS ANAND

## ➔ Consider the scientific evidence

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 In 2004 Dr. Robert White, a brain surgeon and neuroscientist at Case Western Reserve University, testified in a US District Court that by the 20th week, the unborn baby not only feels pain, but has a higher pain sensitivity than adults. <sup>1</sup>
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 Dr. KJS Anand's groundbreaking study of foetal pain showed that sensory receptors begin developing at 7 weeks. They spread to the whole face, palms and hands by 11 weeks, the trunk and upper arms and legs by 15 weeks, and the rest of the body by 20 weeks. <sup>2</sup>
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 The sensory part of the brain, the neocortex, begins developing at 8 weeks, and is fully formed by 20 weeks. <sup>3</sup>
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 A prenatal anaesthesiologist at Vanderbilt Hospital noted that, under minimal anaesthetic, the unborn baby moved away from the scalpel and visibly flinched when touched by the knife. In consultation with a pediatric pain specialist he increased the anaesthetic, and has since assisted at 200 operations without observing any flinching or other signs of foetal pain. <sup>4</sup>
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 An Indian study on foetal anaesthesiology determined that the foetus feels stress, and anaesthesia for in utero surgeries is appropriate and requires expert attention. <sup>5</sup>
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 The unborn baby's nervous system remembers pain. The same study shows that in utero stress leads to exaggerated pain responses in eight-week old infants. <sup>6</sup>
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 Despite its official position against the existence of foetal pain, the Journal of the American Medical Association promotes the usage of anaesthetics for foetal surgery. <sup>7</sup> It's worth noting that, until 15 years ago, newborn and premature babies did not receive pain relief during surgery as doctors considered that their nervous systems were too immature to sense pain.
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 In the USA, Arizona, Michigan and Georgia are considering bans on abortions after 20 weeks due to the prospect of the unborn baby feeling pain <sup>8</sup>
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 Despite one court challenge, foetal pain laws passed since 2010 are still standing in the US states of Idaho, Indiana, Alabama, Kansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska. <sup>9</sup> Eleven US states now mandate that providers counsel women about foetal pain before performing an abortion. <sup>10</sup>

# BABIES FEEL PAIN

Even foetal pain ban opponents admit that physical pain can be felt as early as the first 8-10 weeks of pregnancy! Stuart Derbyshire believes that consciousness of one's situation is needed to constitute true 'pain', but admits that: 'If we define pain as the response to something painful, such as a scalpel or a needle, then it is evidently the case that the fetus feels pain from a very early gestation (around 8-10 weeks) when the fetus first demonstrates responses to such stimuli.'

**STUART DERBYSHIRE, FETAL PAIN AGAIN, PRO-CHOICE FORUM, JULY 2010**  
[http://www.prochoiceforum.org.uk/ocr\\_ethical\\_iss\\_4.php](http://www.prochoiceforum.org.uk/ocr_ethical_iss_4.php)

When the surgeon lowered his scalpel to the 25-week-old fetus, anaesthesiologist Paschall saw the tiny figure recoil in what looked to him like pain. A few months later, he watched another fetus, this one 23 weeks old, flinch at the touch of the instrument. That was enough for Paschall. In consultation with the hospital's pediatric pain specialist, "I tremendously upped the dose of anesthetic to make sure that wouldn't happen again," he says. In the more than 200 operations he has assisted in since then, not a single fetus has drawn back from the knife.

**ANNIE MURPHY PAUL, 'THE FIRST ACHE' NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, 10 FEBRUARY 2008**  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/magazine/10Fetal-t.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/magazine/10Fetal-t.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)

'How does anybody oppose this?' asked US Senator Mike Johanns. 'If the baby feels pain . . . then (foetal pain legislation) is an issue of human compassion.'  
**ASSOCIATED PRESS, 15 OCTOBER 2010**

## lifefacts/backup

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- 2 & 3. KJS Anand, and PR Hickey, 'Pain and its Effects in the Human Neonate and Fetus,' *New England Journal of Medicine* Vol. 317, no. 21, 1321-1329, 19 November 1987. <http://www.cirp.org/library/pain/anand/>
4. Annie Murphy Paul, 'The First Ache', *New York Times Magazine*, 10 February 2008, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/magazine/10Fetal-t.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/magazine/10Fetal-t.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)
- 5 & 6. Kirti N Saxena, 'Anaesthesia for Fetal Surgeries,' *Indian J. Anaesth*, October 2009; 53(5), 554-559; reposted at *PubMed*, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2900087/>
7. 'Fetal Pain: A Multidisciplinary Review of the Evidence,' *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, <http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/294/8/947.short>
- 8 & 9. Alia Beard Rau, 'Arizona abortion bill stirs debate on fetal pain,' *The Arizona Republic*, 16 March 2012, <http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/news/articles/2012/03/09/20120309arizona-abortion-bill-stirs-debate-fetal-pain.html>
10. 'State Policies in Brief as of April 1, 2012', *Fact Sheet*, *Guttmacher Institute* [http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/spib\\_OAL.pdf](http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/spib_OAL.pdf)

## FOETAL PAIN IS REAL

'For decades, the question of fetal pain has been very much overlaid by the implications that it has for abortion,' said Dr Kanwaljeet Anand, director of the Pain Neurobiology Laboratory at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis. Some of Anand's earliest research showed that newborns were far more likely to survive operations when given anaesthetics. That made him wonder what happens before birth.

Since then, he said, studies have shown that the fetal brain and body are coordinated enough to experience pain by between about 18 and 20 weeks. When a fetus of that age gets a blood transfusion, for example, changes in heart rate and blood pressure accompany shifts in circulation and spikes in stress hormones. A morphine-like drug calms all of those responses down.

'The die-hards will say these are all reflexes,' Anand said. But new evidence, he argued, suggests that the very young brain is developed enough in the right places to take in those sensations and translate them into pain. 'It's excruciating,' he said. 'Not only is sensitivity to pain higher in the fetus, it doesn't know when the pain is going to end.'

**EMILY SOHN, 'DO FETUSES FEEL PAIN?' DISCOVERY NEWS, 26 APRIL 2010**  
<http://news.discovery.com/human/fetus-pain-abortion-law.html>