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Counting Baby's Kicks Could Save Their Life

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DES MOINES, Iowa -- For months, five pregnant central Iowa women prepared just like millions of other pregnant women. They read books, took vitamins, and went to the doctor. And all had healthy babies until the very end. It was six years ago this week that Tiffan Yamen lost her daughter Madeline.

"The doctor rushed me into the ultrasound room, had the machine on for about 30 seconds. He started to cry. And I'm kind of looking at him and the nurse saying 'what's going on?' And all he could get out was 'oh I am so sorry'," Yamen said.

Madeline had a perfect knot in her umbilical cord.

"Too many babies are dying inside tummies at the very end and we want to know why," Yamen said as she sat next to the other women in a Beavertdale coffee shop Monday night.

Weeks after Yamen lost her daughter, the same thing happened to Janet Petersen's daughter Grace.

"She was a perfectly healthy baby. She had a full head of hair. She weighed five-and-a-half pounds but had a true knot in her umbilical cord. It was just heart-wrenching," Petersen said.

The following months Petersen and Yamen would meet Jan Caruthers, Kerry Morlan and Kate Safris.

"At the time I lost my daughter I didn't know anyone else who had been through this," Safris said.

The women would soon learn stillbirths and infant deaths happen to 26,000 American families a year. Two hundred happen here in Iowa.

"If we could cut that number in half that would save 100 babies every year and that would be significant," Petersen said.

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The women created a 'Count the Kicks' campaign that encourages expectant mothers in their last trimester to lie down and count the number of times their baby kicks in two hours. If the number is fewer than 10, they say expectant mothers should call their doctor immediately.

The campaign so far consists of putting posters in doctor's offices, attending health fairs and creating a website. They've also started a 24 hour hotline that families can call if they've lost a baby.

The women say an expectant mother in western Iowa heard about the campaign through a radio public service announcement and started counting kicks. One day the kicks were few and far between and soon her doctor called for an emergency Cesarian section. He found that the umbilical cord was wrapped around the baby's neck four times and was able to save his life.

"It's easy, and it's free. Doing it every day that last trimester is a small investment for a big gift in the end," Yamen said with tears in her eyes.

No other states have a 'Count the Kicks' campaign. But if the campaign works here in Iowa, the women want to start them in other states.

Petersen added, "I think everyone wants to think it would never happen to them. I certainly didn't think it would happen to me."

Learn more about the campaign at www.countthekicks.org.

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