

Preterm Delivery

What is preterm delivery?

A full-term pregnancy is one that lasts at least 37 weeks. Preterm delivery is when the baby is born too early.¹ Preterm delivery is a concern because babies that are born too early may not be fully developed, which can lead to a lifetime of health problems.²

Preterm delivery is sometimes called “premature delivery”, “preterm birth” or “premature birth”.

Facts about Preterm Birth

- One out of every nine babies born in the United State is a preterm birth. This increases rates of infant deaths and lifelong problems for premature babies.¹⁵
- About \$13.6 billion each year is spent on premature births, about half of all birth related expenses.²
- Babies born before 34 weeks are at greatest risk, but babies born between 34 and 37 weeks are also at risk.

It is important to be in good physical and mental health and to visit a doctor prior to becoming pregnant.

- Alcohol and drug use seem to be associated with an increased risk of preterm delivery. Alcohol use is also associated with an increase in the risk of a baby being born with birth defects.^{5,6}
- Smoking tobacco has been shown to be associated with an increased risk of preterm delivery. Smoking around half a pack per day is associated with an almost 45% increase in the risk of preterm delivery. Stopping smoking early in pregnancy seems to be associated with a reduction in the risk of preterm birth.⁸
- Weighing too much (or too little) is associated with a higher risk of preterm birth. Maintaining a healthy Body Mass Index (BMI) - between 18 and 30- is associated with a lower risk of preterm birth.⁷
- Other medical conditions, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, are associated with an increased risk of preterm birth. Sexually transmitted diseases and other infections, such as urinary tract infections, may also increase the risk of premature delivery.^{10,11} Getting medical conditions treated early is important.
- Stress, sadness and worry seem to be associated with an increased risk of preterm birth. Pregnant women should try to avoid stressful situations as much as possible.⁹
- Pregnant women should begin receiving medical care as soon as possible. During “prenatal” care the doctor will provide important treatment and information. Getting early prenatal care is associated with a lower risk of premature birth.¹²
- Some studies show that having an abortion is associated with an increased risk of preterm birth in later pregnancies.¹³
- Having babies too close together may also be associated with an increased risk of preterm birth. In general, babies should be at least 18 months apart to improve the chances of a full term pregnancy.¹⁴