

Special Birth Issues

Preterm Labour

A baby is “preterm” if she’s born before 37 complete weeks of pregnancy. Preterm babies are more likely to have longer hospital stays and may have problems with:

- breathing
- maintaining body temperature
- sucking and swallowing
- low blood sugar
- infection
- bruising and bleeding
- jaundice (yellowish skin)

Babies born too soon are also more likely than full-term babies to have lifelong problems related to vision, breathing, walking and learning.



FAMILY STORY

Our daughter was born at 34 weeks by caesarean section. My wife had really high blood pressure and the baby was being stressed. She was born very small but – thankfully – healthy. But it was one of the most frightening things we’ve ever gone through.

Reducing your risk

Preterm labour can happen to anyone. The cause is often unknown. But your chances of preterm labour are higher if you’ve already had a preterm baby or you’re carrying twins or triplets. If you have a bladder or kidney infection, or a medical condition like high blood pressure or diabetes, your risk is also increased.

You can decrease your risk of having a preterm labour by:

- seeing your health care provider regularly
- eating well
- working with your health care provider to stop or reduce smoking, drinking and drug use
- seeking help if you’re abused (see [Lifestyle](#))
- limiting your workday to 8 hours and finding time to rest
- exploring ways to reduce your stress
- wearing your seat belt with the lap belt below your baby and the shoulder belt against your chest



SEEK CARE

Contact your health care provider or go to the hospital right away if you have these signs of preterm labour:

- a trickle or gush of fluid or bleeding from your vagina that doesn’t stop after going to the bathroom
- stomach pains or bad cramps that won’t go away
- unusual lower back pain or pressure
- contractions that don’t go away when you walk, rest or take a warm shower
- a feeling that something isn’t right



Preterm and Low Birth Weight Babies

What is a preterm baby (“preemie”)?

A baby born before 37 weeks.

What is a low birth weight baby?

A baby weighing less than 2½ kg (5½ lb) at birth.

The earlier your baby is born, the less she’ll weigh and the more health problems she may have. And although one-third of low birth weight babies are born at full term, they often have some of the same issues as preterm babies.



DID YOU KNOW

Babies who have lots of physical contact with a caregiver grow faster than babies who don’t. All babies – even when they’re in an incubator – need to be touched, stroked and talked to as much as possible.



DANGER

Preterm and low birth weight babies are at higher risk for sleep-related death (see [Sleep](#)). Talk with your health care provider about how to make your baby’s sleep as safe as possible.

What to expect

- Your baby may need to go to the hospital’s special care nursery after she’s born. As soon as you can, hold her for skin-to-skin contact (“kangaroo care”).
- Small babies may not be ready to feed right away, but with time and support, they will. In the meantime, hand express or pump your milk often and early – within the first hour, if possible – to establish your milk supply (see [Expressing Your Milk](#)).
- Your baby may need a car seat made for babies under 2½ kg (5½ lbs). In a regular infant seat, her chin may drop down, blocking her breathing.

What is kangaroo care?

Holding your baby skin-to-skin on your chest so she can hear your heartbeat, feel you breathing, and breastfeed.



Twins, Triplets and More

What to expect

- Your babies may be delivered vaginally or by caesarean, depending on their position, how many weeks they are, and their health.
- Breastfeeding early and often and trying different positions will help you produce enough milk (see [Breastfeeding Your Baby](#)).
- Don’t hesitate to ask for help once you’re home.



FAMILY STORY

At first, I was scared to touch my son. He was so tiny and connected to so many tubes. I learned to ask questions and focus on every improvement, no matter how small.



PARTNERS

What You Can Do

If your baby is taken away for special care after birth, go with her to the nursery and take part in her care. The nurse can show you how to change her diaper, hold her skin-to-skin and help her settle.