



Blossom

Central Healthy Start Newsletter | Winter 2009

Dear Readers



GET SCREENED!

Healthy Start offers services for you when you are pregnant or between pregnancies, and for your baby from birth to age three. Services are free and are not based on income, educational background or ethnic makeup. Healthy Start services are based on a “screening”—a simple set of questions to determine if there are any risks that could affect your pregnancy and your baby’s growth or development.

Services include education and counseling in childbirth, breastfeeding, parenting, nutrition, smoking cessation, and between pregnancy care.

Find out if you qualify for Healthy Start services by saying “Yes” to a Healthy Start screening! Even if you do not wish to obtain any Healthy Start services, by completing the screenings you are helping ALL mothers and their babies in your community.

Timing Is Everything

This issue of “Blossom” focuses on preterm and late preterm births and on scheduled C-sections. The Healthy Start program is committed to helping women have healthy pregnancies and babies a healthy start in life. The discussion of preterm births is a critical one, as these babies often face significant health challenges. Moreover, the rate of preterm births is rising in the U.S.

A pregnant woman’s due date is set at 40 weeks, with a normal range being 37 to 42 weeks. A baby is considered to be “full term” at 37 weeks and “preterm” anytime before 37 weeks. “Late preterm” refers to babies born between 34 and 36 weeks.



The rate of preterm births in the U.S. has increased by 20% since 1990, with late preterm births accounting for 70% of these births. It has long been known that babies born preterm are at risk for many health problems. Moreover, recent studies show that even babies born late preterm face significant risks. These findings have resulted in new concerns about the wisdom of scheduled C-sections prior to a woman’s due date.

Preterm Babies Face Many Challenges

Babies born at less than 32 weeks are at the highest risk for a number of health problems, but even late preterm babies may have issues. A few extra weeks or days toward full-term delivery can have a positive effect on an infant’s health.

Preterm babies are at a greater risk for both physical and developmental problems, including:

- Breathing issues
- Vision problems
- Hearing problems

continued...

**Make a healthy lifestyle
and proper prenatal care
a priority for you
and your baby.**

Healthy Start

is a comprehensive program of maternal and child health services intended to improve pregnancy outcomes and help children get a healthy start in life.

Healthy Start accomplishes this through care coordination and support services that include education and counseling in:

- childbirth
- breastfeeding
- parenting
- nutrition
- mental health
- smoking cessation
- between-pregnancy care.

Access to Healthy Start services is free to at-risk women, infants and children and is not based on income.

For more information about Healthy Start services, call your local Healthy Start Care Coordinator:

Citrus County

Lee Brannon
(352) 726-1731

Hernando County

Janet Dick
(352) 540-6800

Lake County

Dianne Casson
(352) 357-1668

Sumter County

Gwen Whitehead
(352) 793-5900

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Preterm births—risks, causes and prevention, cont.

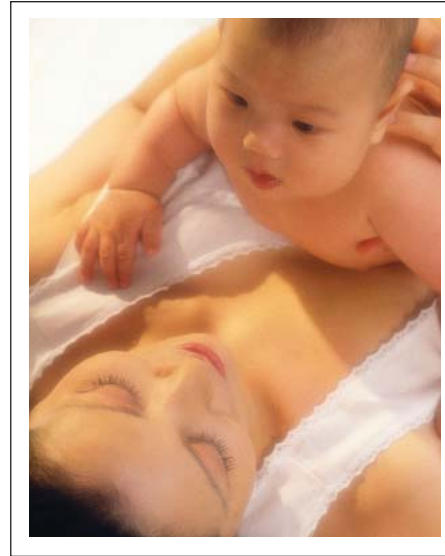
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Asthma
- Feeding difficulties
- Jaundice
- Cerebral palsy
- Developmental delays
- Learning disabilities
- Emotional problems
- Death

While there have been great improvements in treating preterm infants and increasing their survival rate, many preterm babies have health and developmental problems long after infancy. In addition, first year medical costs for a preterm infant average 10 times more than that for an infant born at full term.

Causes & Prevention of Preterm Births

Causes There is much we don't know about why some babies are born too early. Possible causes may include behavioral, environmental, biological and psychological factors as well as medical conditions and genetics. It is known that the preterm birth rate is higher in some racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Women who fall into the following categories are at higher risk for preterm birth:

- Have had a previous preterm labor or birth
- Are pregnant with twins, triplets or more
- Have had multiple miscarriages or abortions
- Have problems with their uterus, cervix or placenta
- Use cigarettes, alcohol or illegal drugs
- Have certain types of infections
- Have chronic conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes
- Are under- or overweight before pregnancy
- Have experienced a stressful life event, such as a death or domestic violence



Prevention Even though the exact causes for many preterm births are unknown, there are things you can do before and during pregnancy to help reduce the risks.

Make a healthy lifestyle and proper prenatal care a priority for you and your baby. Before getting pregnant, discuss with your doctor health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, infections or any other conditions.

Achieving a healthy weight and eating nutritious foods are important, as is the avoidance of substances such as alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs. Avoid unsafe chemicals at home and at work. Be sure to take a multivitamin with folic acid prior to becoming pregnant, as this is known to prevent neural tube defects. Also, have a dental checkup to be sure there are no oral infections, as these may be related to preterm birth.

Finally, try to limit stress in your life. All your efforts will be worth it when your healthy, full-term baby greets the world.

Scheduled C-Sections: A Risk for Baby?

Nine years of national data show that nearly all of the increase in preterm births (for single births) is the result of C-section deliveries. C-section births are necessary when there is a risk to the mother or fetus (for example, high blood pressure in the mother or lack of fetal responsiveness). However, the increase in scheduled C-sections has received a great deal of recent attention for the risks these early deliveries pose to infants.

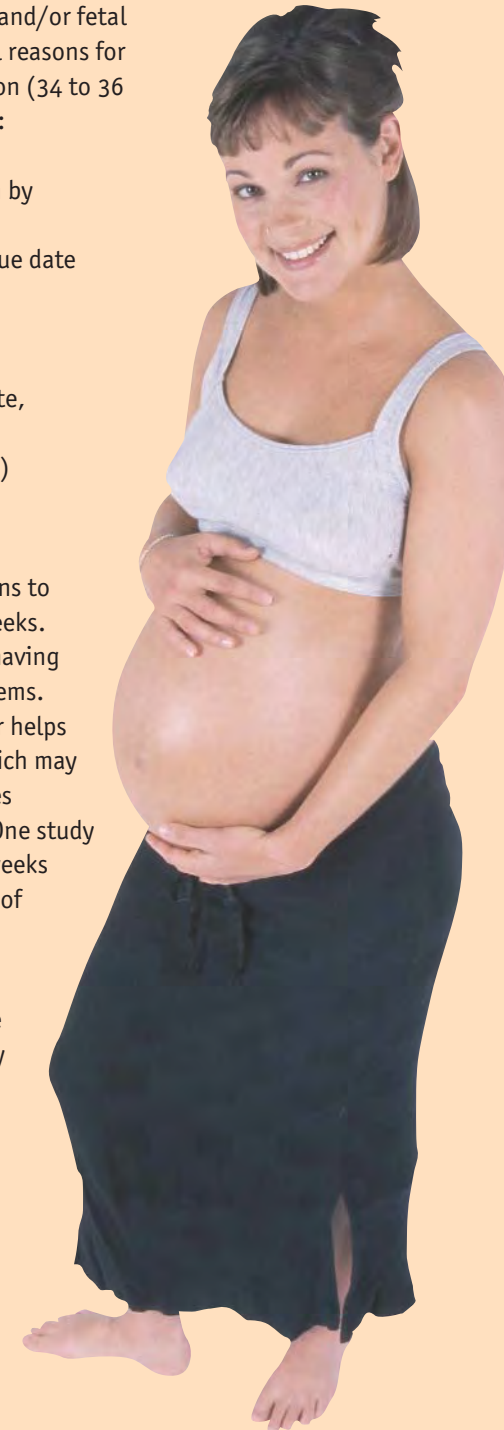
Why So Many? Many women who have had a previous C-section are scheduled for C-section delivery for future births. There is concern in the medical community that many scheduled C-sections are due to non-medical reasons rather than for maternal and/or fetal complications. Some non-medical reasons for scheduling a late preterm C-section (34 to 36 weeks) may include the following:

- Request by the mother
- Inappropriate recommendation by the doctor
- Inaccurate assessment of the due date
- Older mother
- Threat of malpractice lawsuits
- Family in town
- Desire for birth on a certain date, anniversary or birthday
- Tax purposes (before January 1)
- Tired of being pregnant
- Unaware of the risks

Why Wait? There are many reasons to delay elective delivery until 39 weeks. Babies delivered any earlier risk having breathing and other health problems. Interestingly, the process of labor helps to clear babies' lungs of fluid, which may explain why many C-section babies experience breathing problems. One study showed that delivering just two weeks before 39 weeks doubled the risk of problems.

Waiting until 39 weeks to have a scheduled C-section increases the chances that the baby will be fully developed and healthy.

A few extra weeks or days toward full-term delivery can have a positive effect on an infant's health.



Where Can I Get More Information?

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Information on pregnancy, preterm births and C-sections
www.acog.org

March of Dimes

Excellent source of information and resources for everything related to pregnancy, including preterm births and scheduled C-sections
www.marchofdimes.com

Mayo Clinic

A wealth of information on medical topics, including pregnancy
www.mayoclinic.com

PremieParenting.com

A resource for parents of preterm infants, including a list of support groups
www.premieparenting.com/supportgroups.htm

Premature-Infant.com

A resource for preterm infant parents and healthcare providers, including Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) "Dos and Don'ts"
www.premature-infant.com/nicu.html

University of Wisconsin Center for Perinatal Care (Meriter Hospital, Madison, Wisconsin)

Advice for parents of preterm infants
www.meriter.com/living/preemie

Helpful Websites

Childcare
www.dcf.state.fl.us/childcare

Florida Kidcare
www.floridakidcare.org

Pregnancy
www.pregnancy.org

Voluntary Pre-K
www.upkfl.org

Women's Health
www.4women.gov/pregnancy



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If you would like a presentation or more information regarding Healthy Start, contact your local Community Liaison:

Blaire Peterson
 (352) 228-9047
 bpeterson@wellflorida.org



Preterm Labor

Be aware of preterm labor symptoms so preterm birth can be prevented.

Even months before the due date, symptoms may occur:

- Contractions that occur more than six times each hour (a tightening sensation in the abdomen)
- Low, dull backache
- Pelvic pressure or pain
- Diarrhea
- Vaginal spotting or bleeding
- Watery vaginal discharge

Should you experience any of these symptoms, call your doctor immediately.

The doctor will determine if the signs are false labor or the real thing.

Preterm Infants

S N G S T W S L E T T E M F
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WORD SEEK PUZZLE

- BACKACHE
- CONTRACTIONS
- C SECTION
- DENTAL CARE
- DIABETES
- DUE DATE
- FOLIC ACID
- FORTY WEEKS
- FULL TERM
- HEALTH RISK
- JAUNDICE
- LATE PRETERM
- PRENATAL CARE
- TWINS
- WEIGHT



SAY "YES" TO A HEALTHY START FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY!

Healthy Start services cover conception through maternal care for mothers and infancy-to-age-three children. In the early stages of your pregnancy, ask to be screened for Healthy Start services. After your baby is born, be sure to have your newborn screened for Healthy Start services at the hospital or birth center.



Did You Know?

A baby's brain at 35 weeks weighs only two-thirds of what it will weigh at 40 weeks.