

For Starters

Healthy Start of North Central Florida Newsletter

Winter 2009

Timing Is Everything

This issue of "For Starters" 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" 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

Preterm babies, also known as "preemies," are at risk for many health problems. Those born at 32 weeks or less are at highest risk, but even late preemies may have difficulties. A few extra weeks or days toward full-term delivery is important for the baby. Areas of concern for preemies include:

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

There have been great strides in treating preemies and increasing their survival rate, but many such babies have health problems long after infancy. In addition, first year medical costs for a preemie average 10 times more than those for a full-term infant.

Healthy Start is for all pregnant women and their newborns. Just ask your health care provider and say "YES" to a healthy start for you and your baby!



Healthy Start
of North Central Florida

Every baby deserves a healthy start

Care Coordinators

To find out more about Healthy Start services, call your local Healthy Start Care Coordinator. Be sure to ask about courses in how to quit smoking, parenting, breastfeeding and more!

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Causes and 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 in the following categories are at higher risk for preterm births:

- 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

Did You Know?

Be aware of preterm labor symptoms so preterm birth may 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.



- 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 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 a 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.



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

What services does Healthy Start offer?

Healthy Start provides **FREE** services for women, babies and children (up to age 3). Services include education and support in:

- Childbirth
- Parenting
- Breastfeeding
- Nutrition
- Smoking cessation
- Pregnancy education
- Between-pregnancy care
- Mental health counseling, including stress management and post-partum depression

How do I know if I qualify for Healthy Start services?

Healthy Start is not based on income, education or ethnic background. Healthy Start services are based on the results of a screening—a simple set of questions.

In the early stages of your pregnancy, your prenatal care provider will ask if you'd like to take the Healthy Start Prenatal Risk Screen. After your baby is born, be sure to ask at the hospital about the Healthy Start Infant Risk Screen.

By saying "Yes" to the Healthy Start Prenatal and Infant Risk Screen you open the door to obtaining our free services.

For more information about Healthy Start, call your local Care Coordinator as listed on page two or call:

1-800-451-BABY

Useful Websites

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

PreemieParenting.com

A resource for parents of preterm infants, including a list of support groups
www.preemieparenting.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



Healthy Start Speakers

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

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PRETERM INFANTS

WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

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 FULL TERM
 HEALTH RISK
 JAUNDICE
 LATE PRETERM
 PRENATAL CARE
 TWINS
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