



Improving your baby's odds during pregnancy

Most people entering parenthood want nothing more than a happy, healthy baby. In the U.S., about 13% of babies are born too early.¹ And, one in every 33 babies is born with some sort of birth defect.² Healthy choices can help avoid premature labor and birth. You can give your baby the best odds by:

- Eating a balanced diet.
- Avoiding smoking, alcohol and drugs.
- Watching for signs of premature labor.

Feed your body and your baby while pregnant

A pregnant woman needs to eat between 100 and 300 extra calories each day. Recommended weight gain while pregnant is 25 to 35 pounds. Women who are pregnant with more than one baby or are underweight should gain more.³ Women who are overweight or obese should gain less.³ Not gaining the right amount of weight raises the chance of delivering a low birth weight baby, weighing about 5.5 pounds or less. Low birth weight is a major cause of infant death, and is linked to developmental, physical and psychological problems.⁴ Gaining too much weight raises the chance of gestational diabetes and high blood pressure. This can lead to early or complicated childbirth.⁴

While pregnant, make every calorie count for your baby.⁵ Try to avoid making hunger-driven choices by:

- Planning ahead.
- Bringing snacks with you.
- Eating every three hours.

See the Resources section for a link to some great snack and meal ideas.

Prevent birth defects²

Not all birth defects can be avoided, but you can lower your baby's chances. Before you get pregnant:

- Have a preconception exam, especially if you have any long-term health problems.
- Make sure your shots are up to date.
- Begin taking a daily multivitamin that has 400 micrograms of folic acid.
- Get yourself to a healthy weight.
- Quit smoking.

Once you become pregnant:

- Get early and regular care before the baby is born.
- Don't change a cat's litterbox, and avoid places where cats may have defecated.

- Don't eat undercooked meat.
- Avoid touching rodents, including hamsters, mice and guinea pigs.
- Don't eat fish that contain high amounts of mercury. Examples include shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish. Limit your intake of tuna, shrimp, salmon, pollock and catfish.
- Don't drink any alcohol.
- Don't take any prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs or herbs, unless directed to do so by a health worker who knows you're pregnant.
- Avoid pesticides, and speak with your doctor about any chemicals you're exposed to at work.

Know the signs of early labor

More than one in every 10 babies born in the U.S. are born early.¹ If your labor starts too soon, your doctor can give you drugs to slow or stop labor contractions, prevent infection and help your baby's lungs mature faster.⁶ It's important to know the signs of premature labor, so you can get help and better your baby's chances.

Warning signs of premature labor:⁷

- Stomach tightness (contractions) every 10 minutes or more often. These contractions may not be painful.
- Change in vaginal discharge (leaking fluid or bleeding)
- Pelvic pressure; feeling as though your baby is pushing down
- Low, dull backache
- Menstrual-type cramps or pain
- Stomach cramps with or without diarrhea

If you have even one sign of premature labor, call your doctor right away. They may want to check you at their office or the hospital. Or, they may ask you to rest on your left side or drink 2-3 glasses of water or juice to see if these signs of labor stop. If after an hour you still have signs of premature labor, call your doctor back or go to the hospital.⁷

Resources

Visit pregnancyfoodguide.org for pregnancy wellness tips, recipes, and meal and snack ideas. For more information on birth defect prevention or treatment, visit the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at cdc.gov/ncbddd. Or, visit the March of Dimes site at marchofdimes.com for information on healthy pregnancy.



Late preterm deliveries⁸

Since the early 1990s, the number of late preterm babies, those born during 34 and 37 weeks of pregnancy,⁹ rose by up to 20% in some parts of the country.⁸ More frequent cesarean sections and induced deliveries explain most of the rise.⁸ These infants are developmentally and physiologically immature. They suffer from more health problems and higher death rates than infants born full-term.^{8,9}

The risk of breathing problems, which are the leading reason late preterm babies are admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit, drops greatly with every week the pregnancy lasts. Increased risks are found even among babies born at 37 or 38 weeks.⁹

Sometimes health risks to the mother or baby call for an early birth. Your doctor will weigh the risks of delivering early against the risks to your health. Convenience should not play a role when creating a birth plan.

Visit anthem.com/ca for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

Sources

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