

PRETERM BIRTH AWARENESS & PREVENTION

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WHAT IS PRETERM BIRTH?

A full-term pregnancy lasts about 40-weeks.

Babies born **before 37 weeks of pregnancy** (gestation) are considered preterm.

Babies born before 28 weeks of pregnancy are considered extremely preterm.

Babies born before 23 weeks of pregnancy, rarely survive. **The earlier a baby is born, the higher the risk of death and severe short-term and/or long-term health complications.**

Preterm babies may need more help to eat and breathe, and they can suffer from disabilities including digestive problems and bleeding in the brain.

Preterm birth is the leading cause of death before baby's first birthday in the U.S.



WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR PREMATURE BIRTH?

Many things can influence the length of a pregnancy. Some of the risk factors of preterm birth are known, while others are still being explored. Data shows that racism is a root cause of negative birth experiences, including preterm birth.

RISK FACTORS:

- **Institutional racism and implicit bias** - these impact the quality of care and access to support
- **Extreme stress** - experiencing **racism** and chronic stress causes adverse physical changes in the body
- **Health Conditions** such as preeclampsia, high-blood pressure, placenta complications and gestational diabetes
- Long exposure to **extreme heat** during pregnancy and bad air quality
- **Infections** during pregnancy, like COVID-19, STD/STIs, and infections caused by poor oral health
- **Smoking** or being exposed to smoke (marijuana, cigarettes, cigars, vaping)
- **Past injuries** during birth or gynecological surgeries can also increase the risk of preterm birth
- A **previous preterm** birth
- Being pregnant with **multiple babies (twins)**

SIGNS OF PRETERM LABOR

If you experience any of these preterm labor signs, call your provider immediately:

- Regular, frequent tightening of the abdomen (contractions)
- Cramping
- Consistent lower back pain
- Vaginal spotting or light bleeding
- Gush or trickle of fluid from vagina (water breaking)
- A change in vaginal discharge



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF IS THE FIRST STEP TO A HEALTHIER BABY

We know you want to have a healthy baby! Taking care of yourself is the first step to caring for your baby. While there are things beyond your control, consider the following information:

- **Pre-existing medical conditions** such as being overweight, having untreated diabetes or high blood pressure can increase your risk of preterm birth. Talk to your doctor about treatment options, such as **low-dose aspirin** to prevent preeclampsia
- **Talk to your provider about your previous pregnancies** and your OBGYN health history. For example, make sure your provider knows if you have given birth to babies earlier than their due dates
- **Decrease exposure to stressors** you can control
- **Maintain the healthiest lifestyle you can** with the resources you have; eat the healthiest foods you have access to and exercise in places you feel safe
- Discuss with your doctor if you are struggling **to stop drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, cigars, vapes, and any kind of drugs** including medical and recreational marijuana
- **Talk to your doctor about interventions that** can delay preterm labor

LEARN MORE:

- **Preeclampsia/Postpartum Preeclampsia** - Serious pregnancy-related conditions that affects how your organs function
- **Placenta complications** - When the placenta attaches to your uterus wall too deeply or doesn't detach after birth
- **Gestational diabetes** - A condition that appears around the 24th week of pregnancy and your body is unable to regulate your blood sugar

SOURCES:

- MCAH 2019 Preterm Births bit.ly/3EJwMju
- BLACK Doula Consortium - Preterm Birth bit.ly/3ELDOED
- ACOG FAQ - Gestational Diabetes bit.ly/3VCfyKL