



Assessing Pre-term Labor and Birth Risk

Where can I learn more about premature labor and birth?

Talk to your nurses and doctors—they understand how serious premature birth can be and they can help you identify the ways you might be at risk for premature birth. You can also gain information from the following expert organizations, which have partnered together in a nationwide campaign to help prevent premature births:

- March of Dimes:
(888) MODIMES or www.modimes.org
- Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses:
www.awhonn.org
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists:
www.acog.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics:
www.aap.org



www.awhonn.org
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How can I tell if I am at risk for having a pre-term delivery?

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There are certain factors that may indicate you are at risk for having a pre-term delivery such as previous pre-term delivery, smoking, or poor nutrition. There are also tests such as fetal fibronectin testing and cervical length evaluation that may be used by health care providers in caring for women at high risk for pre-term delivery.

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What is the fetal fibronectin test?

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The fetal fibronectin test involves obtaining a sample of vaginal fluid on a cotton swab during a pelvic exam. This sample will be examined for the presence of fetal fibronectin. Fetal fibronectin is not usually found in the vagina between 22 and 34 weeks of gestation. If it's present, it could be a warning sign of pre-term birth within 7-14 days. False positive tests do occur.

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How long does it take to get the test result?

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If the sample is processed at a local laboratory; the results may be available within 1 hour. If the sample is sent out to central laboratory for processing, results will be available in one business day.

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What do the results mean?

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Test results are reported as positive or negative. A positive result may indicate that pre-term birth may occur within 14 days. However, having positive results is not a strong indicator that birth will occur. A negative result is much more reliable and indicates that pre-term birth will probably not occur within 14 days. Often, health care providers feel more reassured in sending a premature labor patient home after a negative fetal fibronectin test.

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What is cervical length measurement?

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Cervical length is measured using ultrasound. An ultrasound probe is inserted into the vagina and the length of the cervix is measured.

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What is a normal cervical length?

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The length of the cervix varies during pregnancy. However, cervical length of 3 cm or more indicates that delivery within 14 days is unlikely.

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Does every pregnant woman need to have a fetal fibronectin test or a cervical length measurement?

A

No. These tests are only indicated if a woman has been identified as being at risk for pre-term delivery. Occasionally, health care providers may use these tests in different ways. For example, some providers may routinely perform these tests on women with a prior history of pre-term birth. Sometimes, a shortened cervix may be found on early ultrasound. Please talk to your health care provider anytime there is a question or concern.