



# Preventing Premature Birth

## 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](http://www.modimes.org)
- Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses: [www.awhonn.org](http://www.awhonn.org)
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)



[www.modimes.com](http://www.modimes.com)  
The March of Dimes does not endorse specific brands or products.



**Fetal Fibronectin**  
MANUFACTURED BY ADEZA BIOMEDICAL

[www.ffintest.com](http://www.ffintest.com)  
This patient education page was made possible through an educational grant from Adeza.



[www.awhonn.org](http://www.awhonn.org)  
AWHONN does not endorse specific brands or products

Permission is granted to reproduce this page for educational purposes.

As a pregnant woman, you probably know your due date and expect your baby to be born right around that time. But do you know that every year in the U.S., more than 476,000 babies are born too early? That's approximately 12 percent of all live births—or one of eight babies born. Yet for half of these babies born too soon there is no known cause why labor and birth occurred too early.

Babies born too soon, or prematurely, can suffer lifelong health consequences, such as mental retardation, chronic lung disease, cerebral palsy and blindness, among other problems. Babies born prematurely are the

leading cause of newborn death. Prematurity is such a large threat to unborn babies that many organizations have joined forces to better understand its causes so that it can be prevented. Because we do not yet know how to prevent pre-term labor, which can lead to pre-term birth, the best actions for pregnant women are to stay as healthy as possible through pregnancy and know the signs of pre-term labor. By knowing these signs, pregnant women and their unborn babies can get early treatment to help reduce the problems associated with being born too soon or too small.

## Could Your Baby Be At Risk for Premature Birth?

Are you experiencing, or have you experienced, any of the following during your pregnancy:

	Yes	No	Notes
• Contractions every 10 minutes or more often?			
• Clear, pink or brownish fluid (water) leaking from your vagina?			
• The feeling that your baby is pushing down?			
• A low, dull backache?			
• Menstrual-like cramps like you might have with your period?			
• Cramps with or without diarrhea?			

## Seeking Treatment for Signs of Pre-term Labor or Birth

If you answered "yes" to any of the above questions, contact your health care provider as they have instructed or go to the hospital—your baby could be at risk for premature birth.

Premature babies are those who are born before 37 weeks of pregnancy, or three or more weeks before your due date. Pre-term labor can happen to any pregnant woman at any time. In some cases it can be stopped or medications can be given to help the baby before delivery. Knowing about pre-term labor now could save your baby's life.

When you contact your health care provider, she or he may tell you to:

- Stop what you are doing and rest on your left side for one hour; drink 2 to 3 glasses of water or juice (not coffee, soda or any beverage with caffeine) during this time
- Call again or go to the hospital if your symptoms get worse or don't get better after one hour
- Spend the rest of the day resting and drinking as much water or juice as possible if your symptoms improve after relaxing for at least one hour
- Come into the office or go immediately to the hospital for a check-up, which may include one or more of the following depending on your individual factors: cervical exam, cervical ultrasound, fetal fibronectin testing (fFN) or electronic fetal monitoring

## Reducing Risks for Pre-term Birth

Experts don't know exactly what causes pre-term labor or birth but there are some widely recognized choices that women can make to help give their babies the healthiest start possible, including:

- Start getting regular prenatal check-ups; go to every appointment
- Take a daily prenatal vitamin throughout your pregnancy
- Tell your health care provider if you have ever had a pregnancy that ended early or a labor that started before your 37th week of pregnancy
- Don't use tobacco or drink alcohol; they are not good for you or your baby; avoid second-hand smoke both

at work and at play; if you smoke, quit; if you can't stop smoking, cut back

- Don't use any illegal drugs and tell your health care provider about any prescription or over-the-counter medicines you are taking
- Avoid stress as much as possible; ask family and friends to help you stay as stress-free as possible; rest whenever you can
- Call your health care provider if you feel any burning or pain when you go to the bathroom, you may have an infection that needs to be treated
- Know the signs of pre-term labor and what to do if you have them