

Facts

In North Dakota and throughout the U.S., one in eight babies was born preterm in 2003.

Between 1993 and 2003, the rate of infants born preterm in North Dakota increased almost 32 percent.

For more information about healthy pregnancy, visit these Web sites:

March of Dimes
www.marchofdimes.com

The National Women's Health Information Center
www.4woman.gov/Pregnancy/

For more information about nutrition, food safety and health, visit the NDSU Extension Service Web site:
www.ag.ndsu.edu/food

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Born Too Soon and Too Small

Questions and Answers About Prematurity

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What does “prematurity” or “preterm” mean?

Full-term pregnancies last between 37 and 42 weeks. Babies born before 37 weeks are called “premature” or “preterm.”



What are the risks for babies born preterm?

The good news is many preterm babies “catch up” with full-term babies in the first year or two. Preterm babies, however, are more at risk for serious health problems, long-term disabilities, cerebral palsy, lung and nutrition problems, vision loss and hearing loss.

What causes preterm births?

About half of all preterm births are of unknown causes. Researchers are studying the causes.

Who can have a premature baby?

Any pregnant woman could have a preterm baby, but you have some things you can do to lower your risk.

What increases your risk of having a preterm baby?

These are some of the risk factors for having a preterm baby:

- Previous preterm or low birthweight birth
- Pregnancy with twins, triplets or other multiples
- Being younger than 17 years old or older than 35
- Smoking
- Alcohol use
- Drug abuse
- Unplanned pregnancy
- Infections or other medical conditions
- Extremes of weight (very under- or overweight)
- Excessive stress

What are some signs and symptoms of preterm labor?

Cramps or pelvic pressure; a low, dull backache; and contractions every 10 minutes or more frequently are some common symptoms. (During a contraction, the abdomen tightens like a fist.) These symptoms don't always mean you are in preterm labor. Your health-care provider can determine if you are in preterm labor. Sometimes women can receive medications to delay or stop labor.

What should you do if you have symptoms of preterm labor?

Call your health-care provider or hospital and follow instructions.

- You may be told to come in to be seen immediately OR
- You may be told to:
 - Stop what you're doing, drink two to three glasses of water, lie down on your left side for an hour and monitor contractions.
 - If symptoms continue or get worse during the hour, call your health-care provider or hospital again and describe what is happening to you.

A healthy pregnancy checklist:

- Have a pre-pregnancy checkup.
- Don't smoke.
- Consume a supplement containing folic acid.
- Don't drink alcohol or use illicit drugs.
- Ask your health-care provider before taking over-the-counter medications.
- Get early, regular prenatal care.
- Eat a balanced, varied diet.
- Gain appropriate weight.
- Reduce stress.

