

# Premature Labor Risk Is Dependent on Mother's Diet

Preterm labor can bring dangers to both the mother and the baby. But what is it and what is its cause?

## Preterm Labor and Preterm Birth

Preterm labor is marked by the contractions of the uterus which occur before the mother is due, or before 37 weeks of pregnancy. This may ensue due to thinning of the cervix or effacement and dilatation of the cervix so that the fetus can enter the birth canal. Preterm labor can result to preterm birth, which is birth that occurs between 20 weeks of pregnancy to 37 weeks of pregnancy. Preterm labor and preterm birth is a growing health concern because it results to babies who are born early or who are premature. Premature babies often suffer from serious health problems because their bodies cannot fully function because of underdevelopment. Premature babies who survive often have learning disabilities and other health problems such as cerebral palsy. The risk for these health problems occur often in babies who are born before 34 weeks of pregnancy, however these problems may also affect babies born between 34 weeks and 37 weeks. Premature babies can even die as a result of preterm births.

There are some risk factors which can give rise to preterm labours and births. These factors include previous preterm births, having a short cervix, having a short interval of time in between pregnancies, history of previous surgeries in the uterus or cervix, multiple pregnancies, pregnancy complications such as vaginal bleeding, underweight mother, smoking during pregnancy and substance abuse during pregnancy.

Mothers who are at high risk for preterm birth can benefit from regular doctor checkups. Medications can be given to help prevent preterm labor and preterm birth. The mother should watch out for signs and symptoms of preterm labor and preterm birth such as changes in type of vaginal discharge (whether it is watery, mucus, or bloody), increase in the amount of discharge, pelvic or lower abdominal pressure, backache which is constant or dull, mild abdominal cramps with or without diarrhea, regular or frequent contractions or uterine tightening, and ruptured bag of water (ruptured membranes). The doctor may then establish a

diagnosis or preterm labor by examining the cervix for changes. Contractions may also be monitored and tests may be ordered such as transvaginal ultrasound. However, not all women who experience premature labor can have premature births. Only about 10 percent of women who have preterm labor will give birth within the next 7 days.

#### **Preterm Labor and Mother's Diet**

Because of the serious medical problems that a premature baby can experience, **premature birth** should be prevented as early as possible. A recent study has found out that pregnant women who eat a **diet** rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains and those who drink a lot of water have a reduced risk of having premature deliveries. Those who eat boiled potatoes, fish and cooked vegetables were also associated with a low risk of having premature labor. This study done by researchers based in Sweden, Norway and Iceland examined the link between **maternal diet** and preterm labor. The researchers used data from the Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study which were from about 66,000 women who were studied between 2002 and 2008. Among the 66,000 pregnant women, preterm delivery occurred in 3,505 (5.3%) cases. The researchers found out that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables was associated with a significantly reduced risk of preterm delivery, especially among women having their first baby, as well as spontaneous and late preterm delivery. More studies are needed to actually establish the link between preterm labor and good nutrition of mothers.

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