

# Going The Distance For A Healthy Baby

(NAPSA)—Preterm birth—meaning the birth of a baby before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy—is a serious health problem in the United States and the leading cause of newborn death. Babies who survive an early birth may face lifetime health challenges, such as breathing problems, vision and hearing problems, cerebral palsy and learning disabilities. Preterm birth is also estimated to cost the nation more than \$26 billion per year in direct and indirect costs.

Though some medical conditions or problems may require an early delivery, preterm birth is often spontaneous. While the causes often are unknown, experts say first knowing if you're at risk and being familiar with the warning signs are key factors in helping to prevent this serious and potentially life-altering situation.

A leading risk factor for preterm birth is **having had a preterm birth before**. Thus, it is important to know that *all* women with a history of spontaneous preterm birth are considered at risk for another preterm birth, regardless of whether the first preterm birth was very early or a “late preterm” (babies born at 34 to 36 weeks). Because the brain and lungs are some of the last organs to develop completely, even late preterm babies—who account for nearly three-quarters of all preterm births—are at increased risk of potentially serious complications and lifelong consequences compared to their full-term counterparts.

Additionally, even if a woman did give birth early and her baby didn't experience any complications, it does not necessarily mean the same will occur in a later pregnancy. Therefore, it's important for women to tell their healthcare providers about their history of births, early births or miscarriages.

Examples of other risk factors for a preterm birth include being pregnant with multiples; certain



**Knowing if you're at risk for having a baby preterm is a key factor in helping to prevent this serious and potentially life-altering situation.**

uterine or cervical abnormalities; high blood pressure or diabetes; being overweight or underweight; having a short time between pregnancies (less than six to nine months); and smoking, drinking alcohol or taking illegal drugs during pregnancy.

To reduce the risk of a preterm birth, a healthcare provider may recommend some changes, such as quitting smoking and avoiding secondhand smoke, maintaining a healthy weight and diet, reducing stress, getting more rest and being aware of any burning or pain during urination (which may signal an infection). The March of Dimes recommends seeing a healthcare provider as soon as a woman thinks she's pregnant, and if possible, getting a health checkup even before becoming pregnant.

“Knowing your risk factors is the first, most important step in preventing preterm birth,” said Ashley Roman, M.D., MPH, clinical assistant professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, New York University Langone Medical Center. “If a woman identifies one or more risk factors, she should consult her healthcare provider about taking steps to help support a full-term pregnancy.”

For more information on preterm birth, including how to reduce your risk and warning signs to look out for, visit the March of Dimes Web site at [www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com).