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Twins: What to expect for your pregnancy

Congratulations! You just found out that you are expecting twins. This can be overwhelming and scary news, but we will be here to help you through it. A twin pregnancy takes special care of yourself and your babies. Here is what you can expect for your twin pregnancy, from nutrition to weight gain to possible complications.

How does a twin pregnancy occur?

If more than one egg is released during the menstrual cycle and each is fertilized by a sperm, more than one embryo may implant and grow in your uterus. This type of pregnancy results in fraternal twins (or more). When a single fertilized egg splits, it results in multiple identical embryos. This type of pregnancy results in identical twins (or more). Identical twins are less common than fraternal twins.

What are chorionicity and amnionicity?

Early in a multiple pregnancy, an ultrasound exam is done to find out whether each baby has its own *chorion (chorionicity)* and *amniotic sac (amnionicity)*. The chorion is the outer membrane that surrounds the fetus. The amniotic sac is the fluid filled sac in the uterus where the baby grows. There are three types of twins:

1. Dichorionic–diamniotic—Twins who have their own chorions and amniotic sacs. They typically do not share a placenta and can be fraternal or identical.
2. Monochorionic–diamniotic—Twins who share a chorion but have separate amniotic sacs. They share a placenta and are identical.
3. Monochorionic–monoamniotic—Twins who share one chorion and one amniotic sac. They share a placenta and are identical.

How often do I need to be seen with a twin pregnancy?

You will have to be seen more often in a twin pregnancy than a singleton pregnancy. You can expect to have an ultrasound at every obstetrics visit to ensure that both of the baby's heart beats are detected normally. You will be seen every 4 weeks up until 23-25 weeks, then you will be seen every 2 weeks until 34 weeks, then you will be seen weekly until delivery. We do cervical exams as clinically indicated starting as early as 24 weeks. You can expect to have growth scans on the babies every 4 weeks and AFI (amniotic fluid index) every 2 weeks starting at 24 weeks for mono/di twins. The growth scans show us that both babies are growing appropriately and the AFI measures the fluid around the babies to make sure that is stable. We test for GBS (Group B Strep) at 34 weeks to see if you need to have antibiotics for delivery. We also perform a position check at 34 weeks by ultrasound to see if both babies are in a good position for a vaginal delivery.

Do I need to gain extra weight with my twin pregnancy?

It generally is recommended that women who are pregnant with multiples gain more weight than women who are pregnant with one baby. An extra 300 calories a day is needed for each fetus. For instance, if you are pregnant with twins, you need an extra 600 calories a day. Here is what we recommend for weight gain based on your Body Mass Index.

BMI 18.5 to 24.9 (normal weight) – weight gain 37 - 54 lbs

BMI 25.0 to 29.9 (overweight) – weight gain 31 - 50 lbs

BMI \geq 30.0 (obese) – weight gain 25 - 42 lbs

Should I exercise if I am pregnant with twins?

Staying active during multiple pregnancy is important for your health, but you may need to avoid strenuous exercise. Try low-impact exercise, such as swimming, prenatal yoga, and walking. You should aim for 30 minutes of exercise a day. If problems arise during your pregnancy, it may be recommended that you avoid exercise.

Is the risk of complications higher if I am pregnant with twins?

The risk of certain complications is higher if you are pregnant with multiples. If a problem is suspected, you may have special tests, such as a non-stress test or biophysical profile, and more frequent ultrasound exams. Twin pregnancy increases your risk to develop pregnancy complications such as preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, and fetal growth restrictions. Based on ACOG recommendations, you should start a low dose of 81 mg of aspirin daily starting at 13 weeks until delivery to help decrease your incidence of these complications.

What is the most common complication of multiple pregnancy?

The most common complication is preterm birth. More than half of all twins are born preterm. Babies born before 37 weeks of pregnancy may have increased risk of short term and long term health problems, including problems with breathing, eating, and staying warm. Other problems such as leaning and behavioral disabilities may appear later in childhood or even in adulthood.

How can twin pregnancy affect delivery?

The chance of needing a cesarean delivery is higher with twins. In some cases, twins can be delivered vaginally. Because a vaginal twin delivery has a higher risk for complications, to be cautious, you will deliver your babies in the operating room. How your babies are born depends on the following:

- The position, weight and health of each baby
- Your health and how your labor is going
- Your obstetrician's experience

Can twin pregnancy affect my risk of postpartum depression?

Having multiples might increase your risk for postpartum depression. If you have intense feelings of sadness, anxiety or despair that prevent you from being able to do your daily tasks, let your provider know.

Can I breastfeed if I have multiples?

Yes, but it may take some practice. Your milk supply will increase to the right amount. You will need to eat healthy foods and drink plenty of fluids. Lactation specialists are available at the hospital and for home visits to help work out any problems you may have.

Nutrition Needs for a Twin Pregnancy

There are several dietary guidelines that help to improve outcomes in twin pregnancies. These guidelines help to optimize fetal growth and development, reduce pregnancy complications, increase gestational age at delivery, and avoid excess maternal weight gain.

Goal diet for twin pregnancies:

- Total calories per day: 3,500 calories
- 20% calories from protein (175 grams)
- 40% calories from carbohydrates (350 grams)
- 40% calories from fat (156 grams)

Suggested Diet Composition by Pre-pregnancy BMI (Body Mass Index)

	Underweight (BMI <19)	Normal Weight (BMI 19-24)	Overweight (BMI 25-29)	Obese (BMI >30)
Calories (kcal)	4,000	3,000-3,500	3,250	2,700-3,000
Protein (g)	200	175	163	150
Carbohydrates (g)	400	350	325	300
Fat (g)	178	156	144	133

Serving Suggestions for Twin Pregnancies in Patients with Normal BMI (19-24)

	Milk/Yogurt/Cheese	Meat/Poultry/Fish/Eggs	Vegetable	Fruit	Bread/Cereal/Rice/Pasta
Daily servings	3	3	3	2	6
Serving suggestion	1 cup milk, 1 oz cheese	2-3 oz lean meat, fish, poultry, 1 egg	1 cup raw/cooked vegetable, 2 cup raw green leafy vegetable	1 cup fruit , 1 cup dried fruit	1 slice bread, 1 cup ready to eat cereal, 1 cup cooked rice/pasta

Micronutrient Supplements in Twin Pregnancies

	First Trimester	Second Trimester	Third Trimester
Prenatal vitamin with Iron (30 mg of elemental iron)	1	2	2
Calcium (mg)	1,500	2,500	2,500
Vitamin D (IU)	1,000	1,000	1,000
Magnesium (mg)	400	800	800
Zinc (mg)	15	30	30
DHA/EPA (mg)	300-500	300-500	300-500
Folic Acid (mg)	1	1	1
Vitamin C/E (mg/IU)	500-1,000/400	500-1,000/400	500-1,000/400