

Early Delivery at 22 to 23 Weeks

We are here for you



We care about your family. Finding out that your baby may be born early can bring up many emotions. You may feel scared, sad, angry, confused, and hopeful, all at the same time. Each person handles this news in their own way.

We want to know how we can best support you and your family. Please tell us what you would like us to call your baby – for example, if there is a name you have chosen.

Next Steps

Our goals are to keep you safely pregnant and to keep your baby from being born early. We are also here to talk with you about what may happen in the future, and to support you and your family.

We want to understand your thoughts and concerns so we can provide the best care possible when you deliver your baby. We are here to help you make a decision that is right for you and your baby.

Together, you and your care team will plan what to do if your baby arrives early. No matter what happens, our Maternal-Fetal Medicine and Neonatology teams will be with you every step of the way.

Talking About What May Happen

To help with decision making, we will share what may happen next. We know that thinking about the future can cause worry. You may want to hear about what to expect and also not want to think about it. We want to give you the information that will be most helpful to you.

Some parents want to know the most common outcomes for babies who are born early. Other parents want to hear about “best case” and “worst case” situations. Others want to hear numbers and statistics.

- **What would be helpful for you to know?**
- **What do you want to hear about what might happen in the future?**

What to Expect

The very difficult news is that even if babies receive the best medical care and attention, many born at 22 to 23 weeks do not survive to go home. But some babies do survive and come home after many months in the NICU.

Many of these babies who survive face ongoing health issues because of being born so early. These babies often need long-term, intensive support as they grow and develop, even after they leave the NICU.



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this handout.*

Health Outcomes

Babies who are born at 22 to 23 weeks are not yet fully developed. This can affect their long-term health. Here are some of the issues that these preterm babies might have:

- Impacts on their ability to move, such as *cerebral palsy*
- Issues with their thinking and behavior, such as *intellectual disability*, *autism*, or learning differences
- Partial or complete loss of hearing or sight

We cannot tell which health issues your baby might have, or how serious they could be. It is less common, but some babies born at 22 to 23 weeks survive without having major issues.

Please Tell Us What Is Important to You

Learning that you may have a preterm delivery and knowing what it might mean for your baby, what is most important to you as parents? What are your hopes? What are your worries?

Quality of Life

The question of quality of life is very personal. Parents have many different beliefs about what a good quality of life would be for their child. Quality of life includes the baby's comfort, future abilities, and length of life.

Being a Loving Parent

Parents care for and protect their babies in many different ways. There are no wrong decisions in these situations. We know that whatever you decide comes from a place of care and love for your baby and for your family.

We are here to listen. We want to learn what is true for you.

Making a Decision Together

When a baby is born at 22 to 23 weeks, there are decisions to make. These decisions are very personal to each family.

Some parents decide that having close family time after birth is their highest priority, even though it means giving up the chance of survival. These babies are warmly swaddled and held by their parents. They usually live minutes to hours and have a natural death. The medical team makes sure these babies are comfortable and we are nearby to support these families throughout this time. We also help these families build lasting memories with photos and treasured mementos.

Other parents decide a chance for longer-term survival is most important. This may mean not knowing whether their child might have a disability or might not survive at all. These parents agree to a *trial of intensive medical interventions*. To help their baby survive, we may try inserting a breathing tube (*intubation*) and breathing support (*mechanical ventilation*). The medical team makes sure these babies are as comfortable as possible. For parents who choose this trial of intervention, we will continue to share information and guidance at every step.

Deciding what to do when a baby will be born very early is very hard. Our team will support you in making this decision. Please tell us if you would also like to talk with a spiritual care provider, a *palliative* (comfort) care or ethics provider, or a social worker. These providers can offer extra support and guidance.

Our entire medical team will respect the loving and personal decision you make for your baby and family.

Support for You and Your Family

We know that this is a very stressful time for you and your family. Sadly, many families must face the loss of their infant. Others travel a long and uncertain journey in intensive care. Some families face long-term issues related to their baby being born early. Many families tell us that they feel deeply changed in meaningful ways during this time.

It may help to get support from other loved ones, friends, counselors, clergy or spiritual leaders, or parent support groups during this time. No matter what lies ahead, we are by your side every step of the way.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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