

# Your Pregnancy with Multiples

## *What to expect*

*The handout explains what to expect when having multiples, and how to choose a prenatal provider who can provide your pregnancy care needs.*

### **Congratulations!**

This is a very exciting time. Your pregnancy may be a dream come true. But you might be shocked to find out you are having more than 1 baby. Over time, the shock will ease, and you will start to plan for a healthy pregnancy and healthy babies.

Some parents decide to share their news with only a few friends and family members until after 12 weeks. This is when the small risk of miscarriage or *spontaneous natural reduction* is lower.

Spontaneous natural reduction is a natural event. When it occurs, the pregnancy reduces from twins to one baby, or from triplets to twins or one baby.

### **A High-Risk Pregnancy**

Pregnancy with multiples is a *high-risk pregnancy*. This means it's more likely that you or your babies will have health problems during pregnancy or birth, or after delivery. These could be very minor problems, but some conditions can be life threatening for a woman or her babies.

Preterm labor and birth are the biggest concerns with multiples. Up to 60% of twins (60 out of 100 twins) are born preterm. Other problems include problems with the placenta or umbilical cord, or babies not growing equally. For the mother, there may be blood pressure problems such as *gestational hypertension* or *preeclampsia*.



*Now is the time to start planning for a healthy pregnancy and healthy babies.*

Some families expecting multiples have an easy pregnancy and reach full term without many challenges. Others reach full term or almost full term after having a few problems. If problems are caught early, families can usually have healthy babies with the help of their care team.

## Preterm Birth

Your provider has given you a due date. This date is 40 weeks from the first day of your last menstrual period.

Babies are called full term at 37 weeks. Babies born before 37 weeks are considered preterm.

Here are some facts about multiples and preterm birth:

- Twins are **5 times more likely** than a single baby to be born preterm.
- Triplets are **9 times more likely** than a single baby to be born preterm.
- On average, twins are born at about 36 weeks, a month before their due date. More than half of twins (60%, or 60 out of 100) are born before 37 weeks, and 12% (12 out of 100) are born before 32 weeks.
- For triplets, 93% (93 out of 100) are born before 37 weeks and 36% (36 out of 100) are born before 32 weeks.

In comparison, only 11% (11 out of 100) of single babies are born before 37 weeks. Only 2% (2 out of 100) are born before 32 weeks.

## Risks of Being Born Preterm

Most babies born before 37 weeks need care in special nurseries. This is because preterm infants may have:

- A low birth weight
- Problems breathing, feeding, and holding their body temperature for a short time after birth
- A higher risk for long-term medical problems such as hearing loss, vision problems, and developmental disabilities and delays

The earlier preterm infants are born, the more serious these problems can be. A small number of preterm infants do not survive. But, most preterm infants do very well when given the special care they need. Those born after 32 weeks are the most likely to do well.

## Choosing a Care Provider

It is important to find a provider who knows how to care for pregnancy with multiples. You may want to choose a *perinatologist* for your prenatal care. A perinatologist is a doctor who specializes in high-risk pregnancy. These doctors have 2 to 3 years of extra training after their 4-year program for obstetrics and gynecology (OB/GYN).

Perinatologists know how to monitor a pregnancy with multiples. They will watch carefully for signs of any problems.

It is very important to see a perinatologist for some high-risk pregnancies. See a perinatologist if you are having twins who:

- Share a placenta (*monochorionic/diamniotic* twins)
- Share both a placenta and a single *amniotic sac* (*monochorionic/monamniotic* twins)

If you prefer, you can choose to see your other provider for regular prenatal visits, then have 2 or more visits with a perinatologist during your pregnancy.

## Services at University of Washington Medical Center

### Prematurity Prevention Program

The Prematurity Prevention Program at UWMC is for families at risk for preterm birth. This includes families who are expecting multiples. This program has been providing high-quality care for families for almost 20 years. The care team includes perinatologists, specially trained nurses, resident doctors, a social worker, and a nutritionist.

### Maternity and Infant Care Clinic

Choose a hospital where you will feel safe and comfortable giving birth. The Maternity and Infant Care Clinic at UWMC - Montlake provides care for women:

- During the labor and birth process
- Who have high-risk pregnancies and need care in the hospital before they deliver
- Who are staying in the hospital with their babies after delivery

Our *antepartum* (before birth), labor and delivery, and *postpartum* (after birth) units provide a calm and soothing setting. You will receive high-level care from skilled providers who are comfortable caring for families with multiples.

## Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

UWMC - Montlake has a Level 3 Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). A Level 3 NICU is the highest level. It is able to care for very small or very sick newborn babies. The unit provides care for both full-term and preterm infants who need extra care.

## Lactation Services

Our Lactation Services program provides special support to mothers of multiples. Specially trained nurses in this program can help you with your breastfeeding concerns.

## Prenatal Care

At UWMC's Prematurity Prevention Program, you will receive much more than routine prenatal care. We provide:

- Clinic visits more often than single pregnancies.
- Awareness of common concerns of families expecting multiples.
- Screening at each visit for symptoms of preterm labor.
- A high trust and belief in your instincts about what is occurring in your pregnancy.
- An *ultrasound* evaluation to help find out if your babies are sharing a placenta or if each has its own placenta. Multiples who share a placenta are at higher risk of having certain problems.
- Ongoing ultrasound checks to find out about:
  - Your babies' growth and development
  - The length of your cervix (early shortening could mean a problem)
  - Your amniotic fluid levels
- Special screening for urinary tract and vaginal infections.
- Nutritional assessment and dietary counseling for pregnancy with multiples.
- Social situation and work situation assessment and counseling.
- Regular testing or nonstress tests during the 3rd trimester. These tests check for uterine contractions and the babies' well-being.
- 24-hour access to nurses who know about preterm labor and the needs of families expecting multiples. When you call, you will talk with either a Triage Nurse or a Labor and Delivery nurse.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call us if you have questions about our program. We are happy to talk with you about our services and how we can provide complete prenatal care or consultation care for you during your pregnancy with multiples.

To schedule an appointment or to talk with a nurse, please call the Prematurity Prevention Program at the Maternal and Infant Care Clinic:  
206.598.4070.