

Pregnancy Related Terms



- A -

- ***Abruption***

When the placenta prematurely breaks away from the uterine wall. Also called abruptio placentae.

- ***ACOG***

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is a private, voluntary, nonprofit organization of women's healthcare professionals. The ACOG currently has over 37,000 physician members.

- ***Active Labor***

The period of time when your cervix dilates between four and eight centimeters. Contractions usually come between three and five minutes apart, dilating the cervix approximately one centimeter (one "finger") per hour.

- ***Alpha-Fetoprotein***

A test that assesses the risk (does not diagnose) of neural tube defects and Down Syndrome. Usually given between the 15-20 weeks; preferred at 16 weeks.

- ***Amniocentesis***

This procedure entails drawing a small quantity of amniotic fluid from the sac surrounding the fetus. The particles of the baby's sloughed-off skin cells floating in the water are then tested for fetal abnormalities.

- ***Amniotic Fluid***

This protective liquid, consisting mostly of water, fills in the sac surrounding the fetus.

- ***Amniotic Sac***

The sac that holds the protective liquid called amniotic fluid that surrounds the fetus.

- ***Anemia***

An iron deficiency common in pregnancy.

- ***Anesthesiologist***

A doctor who administers drugs like an epidural.

- ***Anterior***

Baby faces the correct way (face down) when emerging from the uterus.

- ***Apgar Score***

This is a measurement of a newborn's response to birth and life outside the womb. Ratings are based on Appearance (color); Pulse (heartbeat); Grimace (reflex); Activity (muscle tone) and Respiration (breathing). The score is taken at 1 and 5 minutes (sometimes also at 10 minutes) after birth, the high score being 10 and the low score being 1. This scale was named for its creator, Virginia Apgar (1909-1974).

- ***Areola***

The dark area encircling the nipple. (When breastfeeding, you will need to make sure the baby latches onto the areola, not just the nipple.)

- ***AROM***

Acronym stands for artificial rupture of membranes. It means that a doctor or midwife breaks the woman's water to begin labor.

- B -

- ***Bags of Water***

Another term for the membranes that surrounds the fetus.

- ***Basal Body Temperature (BBT)***

Your base body temperature - that is, before movement, caloric consumption or anything else is factored in.

- ***Betamethasone***

A common drug used to help develop the baby's lungs when it appears the woman will deliver prematurely. Given by injection into the mother's muscle.

- ***Bilirubin***

The waste product that results from the breakdown of hemoglobin molecules from worn out red blood cells. It is normally excreted from the body as the main component of bile. See Jaundice.

- ***Biophysical profile (BPP)*** *A name given to a special ultrasound assessment, often following a nonreactive nonstress test.*

- ***Bloody Show***

Blood-tinged mucous from the vagina. May mean you are losing the mucous plug that has sealed off the cervix up to this point.

- ***Bradley Method***

Also known as "Husband-coached Childbirth," instructors teach natural breathing, encourage husband support, breastfeeding, etc.

- ***Braxton-Hicks Contractions***

These "practice" contractions occur at various times during pregnancy, but can increase in intensity during your last month. They happen at random and are typically not painful. They do not dilate the cervix as "real" contractions do.

- ***Breech Presentation***

Where the fetus is positioned head up to be born buttocks first or with one or both feet first. Breech positioning is relatively uncommon, occurring in fewer than five percent of all births.

- ***Brethine (Terbutaline)***

Drug used in pregnancy to slow or stop labor because even though it is an asthma medication, it relaxes smooth muscles, and the uterus is a smooth muscle.

- C -

- ***Catheter***

A small, flexible tube. Catheters are commonly used in epidurals and when a woman cannot

urinate (a catheter is placed up the urethra and into the bladder)--commonly referred to as "being cathed."

- ***Cephalopelvic Disproportion (CPD)***

The term given when the size, presentation, and position of the baby's head in relationship to the mom's pelvis prevents dilation of the cervix and/or descent of the baby's head.

- ***Cervidil***

A medication used to ripen the cervix before induction (or to induce labor by itself).

- ***Cervix***

The entrance to the uterus.

- ***Cesarean***

The baby is delivered via an incision made in the mother's abdomen and uterus. (-section, -birth, -delivery)

- ***Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS)***

This procedure tests for genetic fetal defects by analyzing a piece of chorion, which is the outer tissues of the sac surrounding the embryo. CVS can be done earlier than amniocentesis, typically between 9 and 11 weeks of pregnancy.

- ***Colostrum***

Baby's first food, this is a thin white fluid discharged from the breasts at the beginning of milk production, and usually noticeable during the last few weeks of pregnancy (though may appear in tiny amounts as early as 16 weeks). Colostrum is rich in antibodies.

- ***Complete Breech***

The baby's buttocks are presenting at the cervix, but the legs are folded "indian style," making vaginal delivery difficult or impossible.

- ***Conception***

When the sperm penetrates the egg, a new life has been created.

- ***Contraction***

The regular tightening of the uterus, working to dilate and efface the cervix and to push the

baby down the birth canal.

- **CORKSCREW MANEUVER** Also known as Woods maneuver, see below.

- ***Cord Prolapse***

Describes a condition where the umbilical cord slips down below the baby and into the vaginal canal during birth and is directly blocking the baby from being born without compressing the cord (which would cut off baby's oxygen and blood supply).

- ***Crowned/Crowning***

Describes when the baby's head is pushing through the fully dilated cervix and ready to pass into the birth canal.

- D -

- ***Demerol***

A narcotic pain reliever commonly used in labor and delivery.

- ***Dilation***

The amount the cervix has opened in preparation for childbirth, dilation is measured in centimeters or, less accurately, in "fingers." "Fully dilated" means you're at 10 centimeters and are ready to push.

- ***Doppler***

A device which employs ultrasound to listen to the fetal heart. Sometimes referred to as a Doptone.

- ***Doula***

The Greek definition is "trusted servant" or "woman's servant." Also known as a midwife, the term refers to a woman who helps a couple through childbirth.

- E -

- ***Early labor***

This is usually when you've had regular contractions for two hours or more, as frequent as every five minutes to every twenty minutes. Your cervix dilates up to three or four centimeters during this stage.

- ***Eclampsia***

Pregnancy-induced hypertension, a dangerous condition that may occur during pregnancy. Symptoms may include elevated maternal blood pressure, swelling of ankles and hands, sudden weight gain and protein in the urine. See also pre-eclampsia.

- ***Ectopic (Tubal) Pregnancy***

A pregnancy that occurs outside of the uterus. The large majority of ectopic (tubal) pregnancies occur in the fallopian tube, but some can occur in the abdominal cavity as well.

- ***Edema***

Swelling of soft tissues as a result of excess water retention.

- ***Effacement***

This refers to the thinning of the cervix in preparation for birth, and is expressed in percentages. You'll be 100% effaced when you begin pushing.

- ***Electronic Fetal Monitor (EFM)***

This electronic instrument is used to record the heartbeat of the fetus and contractions of the mother's uterus.

- ***Embryo***

From conception to the eighth week of pregnancy, the baby growing inside you is called an embryo.

- ***Endometrium***

The blood-rich mucus membrane lining the uterus (which is usually shed as your period). The embryo implants into this lining, and takes early nourishment from it.

- ***Engaged***

When the baby's presenting part (usually the head) has settled into the pelvic cavity, usually in the last month of pregnancy. You are likely to notice that the baby's position has visibly changed and may also feel increased pressure on your bladder.

- ***Epidural***

A common method of administering anesthesia during labor. A small amount of anesthesia is inserted through a narrow catheter threaded through a needle inserted into the dura space near the spinal cord.

- ***Episiotomy***

An incision made during childbirth to the perineum, the muscle between the vagina and rectum, to widen the vaginal opening for delivery.

- ***External Version***

Performed late in pregnancy, this is where a doctor manually attempts to move a breech baby into the typical head-down position for birth.

- F -

- ***Face Presentation***

A relatively uncommon labor presentation, when the baby is head down but has its neck extended, as if looking down the birth canal, rather than with its chin tucked. (Also similar: brow presentation)

- ***Failure to Progress***

Also called dysfunctional labor. Diagnosis given to a woman who does labor does not follow a "normal" pattern and is severely prolonged.

- ***Fallopian Tubes***

Two narrow "tubes" leading from either side of the uterus to the ovaries.

- ***False Labor***

This is where you experience regular and/or painful contractions that do not dilate or thin the cervix. It may be impossible for you to differentiate from "real" labor.

- ***Fentanyl***

A narcotic drug generally used sparingly. Many hospitals do not offer this type of narcotic for labor pain.

- ***Ferning*** The appearance of a fernlike pattern in a dried specimen of cervical mucus or vaginal fluid, an indication of the presence of estrogen.

- ***Fetal Distress***

When the baby is not getting enough oxygen or is experiencing some other complication. Immediate delivery may be required.

- ***Fetal Scalp Electrode***

Instrument used to monitor the baby's heartbeat while still in the uterus. This device is placed just under the skin of the baby's scalp. See Internal Monitoring.

- ***Fetus***

The baby in utero, after 8 weeks of pregnancy until delivery. (Before then, it's considered an embryo.) The word fetus means "young one." (Derivative: fetal)

- ***Fontanelle***

One of two 'soft spots' between the unfused sections of the baby's skull. These spots may allow the baby's head to compress slightly during passage through the birth canal.

- ***Footling Breech***

The baby is "upside-down" and one or both of the baby's feet are presenting at the cervix before the buttocks.

- ***Forceps***

A tong-like instrument which may be placed around the baby's head to help guide it out of the birth canal during delivery.

- ***Frank Breech***

The baby's buttocks are presenting at the cervix and the baby's legs are extended straight up to the baby's head.

- G -

- ***Gestation***

The length of pregnancy is called "Gestation."

- ***Gestational Diabetes***

A form of diabetes that appears during pregnancy (gestation). Most pregnant women are tested

for this condition. It may or may not remain after the baby is born.

- ***Group B Strep***

An infection that affects 10-25% of all pregnant women and can cause serious health problems in a newborn. Many doctors screen pregnant women now because the infection can be passed to the newborn during delivery, more commonly under certain conditions (mother has fever or infection is present, amniotic bag has been ruptured for more than 18 hours or baby is premature). The bacteria that causes Strep B is commonly found in the vagina and intestinal tract.

- H -

- ***Hemorrhage***

Bleeding or flow of blood either internally or externally.

- ***Hemorrhoid***

Enlarged veins in the anus or rectum, generally caused by constipation or straining to have a bowel movement. Very common in pregnancy or after childbirth.

- ***High-Risk Pregnancy***

A pregnancy where there are complications or special circumstances that may require specific medical attention or bed rest.

- ***Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin (hCG)***

The hormone pregnancy tests look for, secreted by the placenta. This hormone prolongs the life span of the corpus luteum as well as stimulates production of progesterone, thereby creating the ideal environment for the embryo.

- ***Hydramnios***

The medical term for a condition which involves having too much amniotic fluid.

- ***Hyperemesis***

Extremely severe nausea ("morning sickness"), resulting in weight loss of five percent or more, ketosis, and electrolyte imbalance. It can lead to hospitalization if dehydration occurs.

- ***Hypospadias***

A congenital defect of the penis where the urethra is not at the tip of the penis, but rather in the

shaft. Corrected surgically.

- I -

- ***Incompetent Cervix***

A cervix that does not function properly during pregnancy and is likely to dilate prematurely and cause a miscarriage.

- ***Incontinence***

Inability to control excretions. During pregnancy, urinary incontinence can occur as the baby becomes heavy on the bladder.

- ***Induced Labor***

When labor is started or accelerated through intervention, such as by using an IV drip of the hormone oxytocin (Pitocin), placing prostaglandin gel on the cervix, or by rupturing the membranes.

- ***Internal Monitoring***

During labor, internal monitoring may be needed and is usually in the form of an electrode placed under the baby's scalp. See Fetal Scalp Electrode.

- ***Intramuscular Narcotics***

Pain relievers that are administered by injection into the muscle.

- ***Intrathecal***

This procedure involves administering medicine into the fluid around the spinal cord.

- ***Intubate***

Meaning "to put a tube in," refers to procedure where a tube is placed down the person's throat to assist breathing or for other medical reasons.

- ***IUGR***

Intrauterine growth retardation: The growth of the fetus is abnormally slow. After the birth, the baby appears smaller than the dates say he or she should be.

- J -

- ***Jaundice (neonatal)***

A somewhat common condition in newborn babies, marked by a yellowing of the skin and caused by the immature liver's inability to process excess red blood cells. Treatment for mild cases will include allowing your baby to spend time in sunlight, though in more severe cases, the baby will be admitted to the hospital and placed under lights which synthesize the sun's rays (minus harmful UV radiation).

- K -

- ***Kegel Exercises***

These exercises are done in order to strengthen the pelvic floor during delivery (to help you push more efficiently) and to assist your body in recovering from childbirth. They are most simply done by contracting and holding the muscles used to stop the flow of urine.

- L -

- ***Labia***

The inner and outer "lips" of the vulva (vagina) - the external female genitalia. The outer labia (labia majora) usually have pubic hair and the smaller inner lips (labia minora) are mostly hidden inside.

- ***Labor***

Regular contractions of the uterus that result in dilation and effacement of the cervix.

- ***Lamaze***

A childbirth preparation method where relaxation, breathing techniques and informed decisions are paramount.

- ***Leopold Maneuver***

A set of four movements used to ascertain the baby's position within the uterus. This is done by your healthcare provider placing his or her hands on your belly, and to used determine the baby's presentation (head up or down) and lie (facing right, left, back or front).

- ***Leukorrhoea***

Whitish mucousy vaginal discharge, common during pregnancy. Talk to your healthcare provider if there is a lot of discharge, you notice a strong or offensive odor, or if accompanied by

labial/.vaginal itching or swelling.

- ***Lightening***

When the baby "drops" in preparation for delivery. See also Engagement.

- ***LMP***

Acronym stands for last menstrual period.

- ***Lochia***

A period-like discharge from the vagina that occurs after delivery. The discharge will probably be exceptionally heavy at first and may last five to six weeks.

- M -

- ***Magnesium Sulfate***

One of the stronger drugs given through IV to stop or slow labor.

- ***Malpresentation***

Baby is not "presenting" (positioned in the pelvis) in the anterior (normal) position. There are different types of malpresentation (see breech presentation, face presentation, and posterior).

- **McRoberts Maneuver** Flexing the mother's legs toward her shoulders as she lays on her back, thus expanding the pelvic outlet. One study showed that this alleviated 42% of all cases of shoulder dystocia.

- ***Meconium***

Baby's first bowel movement, this is the greenish substance that builds up in the bowels of a growing fetus and is normally discharged shortly after birth.

- ***Midwife***

A DEM (Direct Entry Midwife) assists homebirths while a CPM (Certified Professional Midwife) assists births that take place in the hospital or birthing center. Both health care providers offer prenatal care and strive to reduce c-section rates, traumatic deliveries and un-needed medical intervention.

- ***Mittelschmerz***

Some women feel an abdominal pain or twinge - mittelschmerz, literally meaning "middle pain" - upon ovulation.

- ***Molding***

Because the newborn's skull bones are not yet fused (to assist the birthing process), baby's heads can look "coned" or squished. This molding will not be permanent.

- ***Mucous Plug***

Pinkish mucous discharge - which blocks the cervix during pregnancy - that you may see when the cervix starts to open. Also called the 'show' or 'bloody show,' it is generally considered a sign that labor will soon begin.

- N -

- ***Neonatal***

Referring to the newborn period (the first four weeks of life).

- ***Neonatalogist***

A specialist who cares for newborns.

- ***NICU***

Acronym stands for neonatal intensive care unit.

- NITRAZINE (for vaginal fluid pH)

- ***Non-stress Test (NST)***

A noninvasive test in which fetal movements are monitored and recorded, along with changes in fetal heart rate.

- ***Nubain***

Synthetic narcotic pain reliever commonly used in labor and delivery.

- O -

- ***Obstetrician***

A doctor who specializes in pregnancy, labor and delivery.

- ***Oligohydramnios***

The medical term for a condition which involves having too little amniotic fluid.

- ***Oxytocin***

The hormone secreted by the pituitary gland that stimulates contractions and the milk-eject reflex (let-down). Pitocin is the synthetic form of this hormone.

- P -

- ***Pelvic Floor***

Describes the area of the vulva, perineum, and anus. The pelvic floor muscles are the muscles a woman tries to loosen while giving birth.

- ***Perineum***

The muscle and tissue between the vagina and the rectum.

- ***Phenergan***

A drug used as a sedative and also to control nausea and vomiting.

- ***PIH***

Pregnancy Induced Hypertension. See Eclampsia and Pre-eclampsia.

- ***Pitocin***

Synthetic oxytocin (a hormone that stimulates contractions, among other things) given through intravenous drip (IV) to stimulate labor.

- ***Placenta***

This is the tissue which connects the mother and fetus that transports nourishment and takes away waste.

- ***Placenta Previa***

This condition is usually discovered in late pregnancy. The placenta lies very low in the uterus, so that the opening of the uterus is partially or completely covered.

- **POOLING** (The secretions and material that accumulate in the posterior fornix of the vagina; used for sampling, principally for evaluation after premature rupture of membranes).

- ***Post Term***

When pregnancy lasts beyond 42 weeks.

- ***Posterior***

Describing the baby's face-up position during delivery. Normal presentation is anterior (face down). Posterior deliveries generally cause back labor (back pain).

- ***Postpartum***

The period of time after a baby's birth.

- ***Pre-eclampsia***

The precursor to eclampsia, this a condition involving high blood pressure, swelling due to fluid retention, and abnormal kidney function.

- ***Preterm***

Babies born earlier than 37 weeks.

- ***PROM***

Acronym stands for premature rupture of membranes and means a woman's water has broken early.

- ***Prostaglandin Cream or Gel***

Medication used to ripen the cervix before induction.

- ***Pubic Symphysis***

The joint between the pubic bones at the front of the pelvis.

- ***PUBS***

Percutaneous umbilical blood sampling: Similar to amniocentesis. A needle is inserted into the mother's abdominal wall and through the uterus, but is also inserted into the umbilical cord at the base of the placenta. Blood is drawn for diagnostic purposes.

- ***Pudendal Block***

A term used to describe a procedure that gives regional pain relief in the perineum area during birth. Also used when repairing an episiotomy.

- R -

- ***Rh Disease***

Occurs in Rh positive infants whose mothers have Rh Negative blood (lacking the Rh factor) and the father has Rh positive blood. If some of the baby's Rh positive blood cells get into the mother's blood stream, her body produces antibodies that will try to fight them off. If this happens during pregnancy or childbirth, the mother's cells try to destroy the baby's red blood cells.

- ***Ruptured Membranes***

Usually referred to as "breaking of the water bag," this is when the fluid-filled sac that surrounds the baby breaks or tears. You may notice a gush of water or a slow leak, and may not even be certain that what you're experiencing isn't simple incontinence. If you suspect your water has broken, you must inform your health care provider immediately. You should also prepare to have your baby, as the risk of infection increases if the baby is not delivered within 24 hours of the rupture.

- S -

- ***Shoulder Dystocia***

The baby's shoulder gets caught on the mother's pubic bone during delivery.

- ***Silver Nitrate***

Generally administered in both eyes within the first hour of life, this medication is used to prevent serious problems in the newborn's eyes in the event that the mother has gonorrhea (a VSD that is common and can be present without symptoms). Tetracycline and erythromycin can be substituted.

- ***Speculum***

A metal or plastic instrument used to open the vagina slightly wider so that the cervix can be seen more easily.

- ***Stadol***

A narcotic pain reliever commonly used during labor and delivery.

- ***Station***

This is the measure of how far the baby has traveled down the birth canal. "Zero station" means he hasn't yet descended, while "fully engaged" means he is ready to be born.

- ***Stress Test***

This test records the fetal heart rate in response to induced mild contractions of the uterus. See also Non-stress test.

- T -

- ***Teratogens***

Agents such as drugs, chemicals and infections that can cause birth defects when a mother is exposed to them during pregnancy.

- ***Term***

Referring to a 40 week pregnancy ("full term," "preterm" and "post term.").

- ***Timing contractions***

Contractions are usually measured from the beginning of one until the beginning of the next. Time your contractions with a stopwatch or the second hand on a clock. Take note also of the duration of each individual contraction.

- ***Toxemia***

Pregnancy-induced hypertension, a dangerous condition that may occur during pregnancy. Symptoms may include elevated maternal blood pressure, swelling of ankles and hands, sudden weight gain and protein in the urine. See Eclampsia and PIH.

- ***Toxoplasmosis***

This disease is caused by an organism found in raw and rare meat, garden soil and cat feces. It is typically not harmful to adults, but can cause injury to the fetus and placenta.

- ***Transition***

This is the phase after active labor when the cervix finishes dilating to 10 centimeters. Contractions are the strongest and closest together during this phase (which is also the shortest phase).

- ***Transverse***

Describes the side-lying (where the baby's body length is horizontal in the uterus) position of the baby before birth. Unless moved, the baby will have to be delivered by c-section.

- ***Trimester***

Each three-month period during the nine months of pregnancy.

- U -

- ***Ultrasound***

This test uses sound waves to view and examine the fetus or view the internal organs. It can also be used to measure bone size (usually femur length and skull diameter) to aid in gauging the gestational age of the fetus.

- ***Umbilical Cord***

The cord that carries blood, oxygen and nutrients to the baby from the placenta during pregnancy.

- ***Uterus***

The uterus is your baby's home during gestation. Also referred to as the womb, the uterus is hollow with a thick, muscular wall, and is considered the strongest muscle in the human body.

- V -

- ***Vacuum Extractor***

An instrument that attaches to the baby's head and helps guide it out of the birth canal during delivery.

- ***Vagina***

The internal female genitalia where sperm are deposited. Also called the vaginal canal during birth.

- ***VBAC***

Acronym stands for vaginal birth after cesarean.

- ***Vernix***

A greasy white substance coats and protects the baby's skin in utero. Some babies happen to be born with lots of vernix still on the skin. It is harmless, no longer necessary, and will be washed or wiped off.

- ***Vulva***

The vulva is the external female genitalia, and includes the labia, clitoris, and vaginal opening.

- W -

- **Woods maneuver** This is also known as the corkscrew, the attendant tries to turn the shoulder of the baby by placing fingers behind the shoulder and pushing in 180 degrees.