



Glossary of Terms

One of the most difficult and frustrating problems you may have is understanding the technical terms used in describing your care and your baby's care. To help you become familiar with this "new language," we have put together a list of commonly used words with a brief explanation. If at any time you do not

understand a procedure or a term used by the professionals caring for you and your baby, be sure to ask what they mean.

Abruptio Placenta — A serious condition in which part or the entire placenta detaches from the uterine wall.

Additive — A medication added to a solution container, such as the IV bag.

Afterbirth — The placenta and membranes.

AIDS — (*Acquired immune deficiency syndrome or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome*) A disease of the immune system that is characterized by a reduction in the numbers of T cells to 20 percent or less of normal thereby rendering the subject highly vulnerable to life-threatening conditions.

Alcohol — An antiseptic used to destroy or slow down the growth of microorganisms such as bacteria. Alcohol is used to clean the surface of your skin, the administration port, the work area and certain IV supplies.

Amniocentesis — A test done on a small amount of amniotic fluid. It can be done early in pregnancy to test for birth defects. It can be done during the last trimester of pregnancy to check the baby's lung maturity.

Amniotic Fluid — The fluid inside the amniotic sac, which surrounds the baby throughout the pregnancy (sometimes called the bag of waters.) This fluid provides a cushion for the baby and allows for free movement of the baby inside the uterus (womb).

Amniotic Sac — A thin, soft, pliable sheet of tissue or membrane that surrounds the baby and contains amniotic fluid in which the baby floats (bag of waters).

Ampule — A small glass container that contains only one dose of a medication.

Anemia — A condition in which the blood is low in red blood cells, hemoglobin (the red-colored material in your blood, which carries oxygen), or both.

Anticardiolipin — One type of antiphospholipid antibody that can change the blood clotting process.

Anticoagulant — Medicine that thins the blood to stop or slow down clotting.

Antiemetic — A drug prescribed to relieve nausea and vomiting.

Antiphospholipid Syndrome — An autoimmune condition in which the body makes moderate to high levels of antiphospholipid antibodies that can change the blood clotting process.

Antiseptic — A chemical substance used to remove or slow the growth of microorganisms, such as bacteria.

Apgar Score — A simple system for checking a baby's condition after birth. It is commonly reported at one (1) and five (5) minutes after birth. Scores range from 0 to 10.

APPT (Activated Partial Thromboplastin Time) — A blood test that is done to check if your blood is clotting properly.

Areola — The darker colored ring around the nipple.

Aseptic Technique — Special methods of cleaning and handling sterile supplies, equipment, and your IV site in order to keep them risk-free from contamination and reduce the risk of infection.

Autoimmune Condition — A condition in which the body attacks itself by making substances that cause harm to the body tissues.

Bag of Waters — See Amniotic Sac.

Biophysical Profile (BPP) — A test using ultrasound and external fetal heart rate monitoring to establish the well-being of the fetus.

Blood Clot — A solid mass of blood. Blood usually begins to clot within seconds of the skin being cut.

Blood Pressure — The amount of pressure needed to push blood through the arteries.

Bradycardia— Slowing of the heart rate.

Braxton-Hicks Contractions — Mild, irregular, often painless contractions of the uterus during pregnancy. These contractions do not cause the cervix to dilate and are considered normal.

Breech — The condition in which the buttocks or feet of the baby are in the downward position in the uterus instead of the headfirst position.

Catheter — A thin, flexible hollow tube, (usually Teflon® or soft plastic like a tiny straw) inserted into the body to give fluids or medicine.

Cervical Incompetence — An unexplained weakening of the cervix that results in the cervix opening prior to labor.

Cervix — The lower part or neck of the uterus that opens into the vagina.

Cesarean Delivery — A surgical operation where the baby is delivered through an incision in the mother's abdomen (belly). Also referred to as C-section.

Clean (Work) Environment or Area — An area that contains only a limited number of microorganisms and is free from visible soil.

Coagulation Disorder — A condition in which there is a problem with the amount of time it takes for the blood to clot and/or the ability of the blood to clot.

Colostrum — A thick yellowish fluid secreted from the breast which contains a great number of proteins, calories, and increases the baby's immunity to illness. Colostrum may be secreted from the second trimester onward but is most evident in the first two to three days after birth.

Contamination — The spreading of microorganisms, "germs" or dirt onto previously clean or sterile surface. DO NOT USE a contaminated item because it may cause infection.

Contraction — A tightening of the uterine muscles.

Corpus Luteum — The yellowish mass of tissue that forms in the cavity of a follicle in the ovary after the release of the egg cell. It secretes the hormone progesterone.

CVC — Central venous catheter.

Deep-vein Thrombosis (DVT) — The formation of a blood clot in a large, deep lying vein, such as those in the leg. Clots tend to form when blood flow is sluggish and sometimes in pregnancy when there is a rise in the level of clotting factors in the blood.

Dehydration — Severe loss of body fluid that happens when too much water is lost through vomiting or diarrhea and/or water intake is too low.

Dietician — A specialist in planning meals and diets.

Dilation — The opening of the cervix during labor when it is being stretched beyond its normal size to allow for the delivery of the baby.

Dressing — A covering placed on top of the IV site to protect it and keep it dry and secure.

Due Date — The date when the baby is expected to be born; also known as the expected date of confinement (EDC).

Eclampsia — A severe disorder of pregnancy characterized by prolonged, extremely high blood pressure and convulsions.

Edema — Excessive fluid in the body tissue that causes swelling.

Effacement — Thinning and shortening of the cervix as labor progresses.

Electrolytes — Elements, particularly those that affect the distribution of water or fluid in the body. These include sodium, potassium, chloride, calcium and magnesium.

Embolism — Blockage of an artery that slows or stops blood flow. This can be caused by a blood clot that has traveled in the bloodstream into the main circulation pathway, such as in the lungs.

Embryo — In humans, the stage of prenatal development that extends from about 2 weeks after conception until the end of the 7th or 8th week.

Engorgement — When breasts are over-filled with milk or fluids often causing discomfort and slight fever.

Episiotomy — A small incision made into the tissue between the vagina and rectum at the time of delivery to allow more room for the baby to be born.

Estrogen — A female hormone. Estrogen is normally at higher levels during pregnancy.

Familial — A circumstance related to a family rather than outside sources.

Fetus — In humans, the stage of prenatal development from the end of the embryonic phase (7-8 weeks) until birth (38-42 weeks). A fetus has developed its basic structure.

Filter Straw — A small, thin, plastic straw with a filter inside to prevent particles such as glass from being withdrawn with the medication.

Fundal — Refers to the fundus or the upper portion of the uterus.

Genetics — Relates to traits passed down through generations.

Gestation — The number of weeks of pregnancy that have passed since conception. Normal gestation is 40 weeks.

Gestational Hypertension — High blood pressure that occurs during pregnancy.

Growth Restriction (Growth Retardation) — This refers to a slower than expected rate of growth of the unborn baby. Growth retardation does not mean that the baby is mentally retarded.

Hematoma — A bruising or swelling that contains blood.

Heparin — An anticoagulant or “blood-thinning” drug used to prevent your blood from clotting. It is also used to treat abnormal clotting.

Herpes simplex — Either of two viral diseases caused by herpesviruses resulting in watery blisters on the skin or mucous membranes of the lips, mouth, face, or genital region.

HIV — (*Human immunodeficiency virus*) Any of several retroviruses and especially HIV-1 that infect and destroy helper T-cells of the immune system causing the marked reduction in their numbers. Commonly referred to as the AIDS virus.

HPV — (*Human papillomavirus*) A virus that causes various types of warts (common warts of the extremities, plantar warts, and genital warts) including some associated with the production of cervical cancer.

Hyaline Membrane Disease (HMD) — A common cause of difficulty with breathing in a preterm baby; also known as Respiratory Distress Syndrome.

Hyperemesis — Severe vomiting which results in dehydration and poor nutrition and weight loss.

Hypertension — High blood pressure; in general, blood pressure readings of 140/90 or higher.

Infection — The body's reaction when there are too many harmful microorganisms present. Symptoms include fever, chills, swelling of the skin, tenderness, pain, redness, or the presence of pus.

Infiltration — Leakage of IV solution out of the vein and into the surrounding tissues. The skin may look swollen or may feel cool to the touch.

Infusion — Fluid or liquid medication that is administered or given into the body through a vein over a period of time.

Infusion Pump — An electrical and/or battery-operated device that uses positive pressure to carefully control the amount of medication or fluid that is infused.

Injection — Putting fluid or medicine into the body, usually through a needle or a syringe.

Insertion site — The place where the needle or catheter enters the body.

Intravenous (IV) — Within a vein, commonly called IV.

Intrauterine Growth Restriction (IUGR) — See Growth Restriction.

IV Site — The area of your skin where the IV catheter has been inserted.

Ketones — A by-product of burning fat. The presence of ketones in the urine indicates dehydration and some degree of poor food intake.

Labor — The process of regular uterine contractions, effacement and dilation of the cervix that expels the baby, placenta, and membranes from the body.

Lanugo — The soft downy hair that covers and protects the fetus.

Lightening — A sense of decreased weight and abdominal tension felt by a pregnant woman as the fetus moves downward into the pelvic cavity prior to labor.

Low Birthweight — Any baby weighing less than 2,500 grams (5 1/2 pounds).

Meconium — The green material that is passed from the baby's bowels in the first few days after birth. Occasionally the baby may pass meconium before birth to produce meconium-stained amniotic fluid.

Membranes — See Amniotic sac.

Microorganisms — Tiny organisms such as bacteria or viruses. Some can cause infection.

mg/dl (milligrams per deciliter) —

mg = milligram (a unit of weight equal to one thousandth of a gram)

dl = deciliter (a metric unit of capacity equal to 1/10 of a liter)

mg (milligram) — Unit of weight equal to one thousandth of a gram.

ml (milliliter) — Unit of volume equal to one thousandth of a liter.

Miscarriage — Spontaneous expulsion of a fetus before it is capable of living outside the uterus.

MLC — Midline catheter.

Nausea — Feeling sick to the stomach, with an urge to vomit.

Needleless Valve — Short plug-like device with an access port connecting to the IV catheter that allows medication or an infusion to be given without a needle.

Neonatal — Relating to, or affecting the newborn during the first month after birth.

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) — A hospital unit that is specially equipped and staffed to take care of newborns with special medical needs.

Neonatologist — A doctor specializing in caring for preterm and newborns with special needs.

Non-Stress Test (NST) — A test done using a fetal monitor to assess the baby's well-being while still in the uterus.

NPO — “Nothing by mouth.” Fasting; nothing may be eaten or drunk.

Nutrients — Substances (foods) needed by the body in order to function properly. These include water, sugar, protein, fats, vitamins, minerals, and electrolytes.

Obstetrician (OB) — A physician who treats women during pregnancy and delivery.

Occlusion — Something that stops the IV flow. Occlusion is usually caused by a clot inside the catheter or a kink in the IV tubing.

Osteoporosis — A condition that causes bones to become brittle, fragile, and break easily.

Parenteral — A route used to administer fluids or medication, such as through a vein or IV. This can also refer to a subcutaneous or intramuscular administration.

Pediatrician — A physician who specializes in the treatment of children's diseases.

Perinatologist — A doctor specializing in caring for women with high-risk pregnancies. Also called a Maternal-Fetal Medicine Specialist.

Perineal — Refers to the perineum; a mass of muscle and connective tissue that separates the lower end of the vagina and the rectum in the female and the urethra and the rectum in the male.

Peripheral — An area on the extremities or limbs such as arms, hands, legs or feet.

Phlebitis — Inflammation of the vein around an IV catheter. Phlebitis may be caused by the catheter, the medication or infection. Symptoms of phlebitis include redness, warmth or discomfort around the IV site.

PICC — Peripherally-inserted central catheter.

PID — (*Pelvic inflammatory disease*) An infection of the female reproductive tract (often sexually transmitted) and is the leading cause of infertility in women. Symptoms, when present, may include lower abdominal pain, an abnormal vaginal discharge, and fever.

Placenta — The “afterbirth,” the spongy organ within the uterus which establishes and maintains contact, through blood vessels in the umbilical cord, between the mother and her unborn baby.

Platelets — Cells in the blood that stick together to form a clot.

Postnatal — Relating to, or affecting an infant immediately after birth.

Postpartum — The period after giving birth (i.e. *An examination was done 3 days postpartum; Blood was drawn 3 weeks postpartum*).

Preeclampsia — a disorder of pregnancy characterized by high blood pressure, protein in the urine and often, edema.

Pregnancy-Induced Hypertension (PIH) — A condition that generally occurs during the last half of pregnancy, which may have edema, high blood pressure, and protein in the urine. Also called preeclampsia and commonly called toxemia.

Prenatal — Relating to, or affecting an infant before birth; occurring, existing, performed, or used before birth.

Preterm — Any infant born between 20 and 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Proteinuria — Protein in the urine.

Pulmonary Embolism —When a clot breaks loose and moves into the lungs where it can block blood flow between the heart and lungs.

Pump — A small machine or device that controls the flow of medicine or fluid so that the correct amount is given “automatically.”

Rate — The amount of medication given within a certain timeframe. Example: 125 ml per hour.

Respiratory Distress Syndrome (RDS) — Breathing difficulty from any cause; common in preterm infants.

Sharps — Any sharp object (such as a needle) used for medical treatment which could pose a puncture hazard if disposed of improperly.

Sharps Container — Any rigid, puncture-resistant, sealable container such as a liquid detergent or bleach bottle, or metal container; masking tape can be used to secure the lid. Containers should be disposed of when 3/4 full and in accordance with state or local regulations.

Sitz Bath — A bathtub shaped like a chair in which one bathes in a sitting position, immersing only the hips and buttocks for therapeutic reasons.

SIDS — (*Sudden infant death syndrome*) The death of an apparently healthy infant, usually before one year of age, that is of unknown cause and occurs especially during sleep. Also known as ‘crib death’.

Small for Gestational Age (SGA) — A baby who is born smaller than expected for their gestational age.

Sterile — Free of all microorganisms.

Stillbirth — The birth of a dead fetus.

Surfactant — A substance produced by the growing fetus which coats the lungs to prevent their collapse.

Term (Full Term) — Infants born at 37 weeks gestation or later.

Thrombocytopenia — A condition in which the blood does not clot as it should due to a low level of platelets in the blood.

Thromboembolism — A thrombus (clot) that has broken loose.

Thrombophilia — Name given to a group of coagulation disorders in which there is an imbalance of one of the many substances that are part of the

clotting process. When a thrombophilia is present, there is a higher risk for clots to occur.

Thrombophlebitis (superficial) — Swelling of superficial veins (near the surface of the skin) after the formation of a blood clot within the vein.

Thrombosis — The formation of a blood clot.

Thrombus — A blood clot in the blood vessel.

Titrate — Adjusting medicine doses up or down to meet individual needs. The goal is to give the smallest amount needed to do the job.

Toxemia — See Eclampsia and Pregnancy-Induced Hypertension.

Trimester — Any of three periods of approximately three months each into which a human pregnancy is divided.

Ultrasound — A diagnostic test that uses sound waves to identify structures in the body. Also called a sonogram, it can be used to show “pictures” of the baby and placenta and is done to check the status of the baby, its growth, and the status of the placenta. It can also be used to locate certain types of blood clots.

Umbilical Cord — The attachment of blood vessels that connect the baby to the placenta and mother. Average length of the cord is 20 inches.

Umbilicus — The navel (“belly button”).

Uterus — Hollow, muscular organ in which the fetus (baby) grows and develops.

Vagina — The passageway connecting the uterus to the outside genital area. Also called the birth canal.

Varicose Veins — An abnormal swelling and twisting especially of a superficial vein of the legs -- usually used in plural.

Veinography — A test to help detect if a blood clot is present. A substance is put into the vein that shows up on x-ray films. It helps show the location and size of any deep vein thrombosis.

Venous Thrombosis — A condition in which a blood clot (thrombus) forms in a blood vessel.

Vernix Caseosa — A pasty covering chiefly of dead cells and sebaceous secretions that protects the skin of a fetus.

Viable — Mature enough to live outside the uterus.

Vial — A sterile drug container that contains one or more dose(s) of a medication.

Vomit — The act of ejecting the contents of the stomach through the mouth; throwing up.