

Multiple Pregnancies

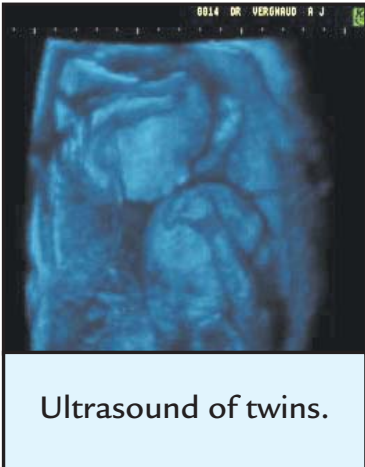


- Multiple pregnancies mean you are carrying more than 1 baby.
 - This could mean twins (2), triplets (3), quadruplets (4) and on up.
 - Multiple pregnancies are more common because of infertility treatments.
 - The occurrence of twins without the use of infertility treatments is 1 in 89 births.
- With fertility treatments, 1 out of every 40 births is twins.
 - These babies may be either identical or fraternal twins.
 - Identical twins grow from a single egg.
 - The egg is fertilized by a single sperm. The fertilized egg divides into 2 identical embryos. Identical twins usually share the same placenta and amniotic sac. They are the same sex, have similar blood type, and look exactly alike. About 1/3 of all twins are identical.
 - Fraternal twins develop from 2 eggs. They are fertilized by 2 sperm. The 2 eggs develop in separate amniotic sacs and have their own placentas. They can be the same sex or opposite sex. They are not identical. About 2/3 of all twins are fraternal.
 - Triplets can be from 1 egg that is fertilized by 1 sperm. Identical triplets happen when 1 fertilized egg divides into 3 eggs. Triplets can also be from 2 eggs. One of the eggs divides into 2. This would make 1 set of identical twins, plus 1 more baby that may be of the same sex or a different sex. Fraternal triplets can be from 3 eggs and 3 sperm. This is the most common type of triplets.
 - Quads, quintuplets (5) and so on are formed in the same way.



Your Care during Your Multiple Pregnancy

- Much of your care is the same as the care you would have if you were pregnant with 1 baby.
- Taking good care of you is extremely important.
- It will help you have healthy babies.
- Standard tests and procedures that are performed during different stages of any pregnancy include:
 - Ultrasound.
 - Screening for Group B strep infection.
 - Alpha-fetoprotein or triple screen test, glucose tolerance test, and non-stress testing.
 - Your weight, blood pressure, and urine will be checked during regular visits to you doctor.
 - The doctor will test the babies' heart rate.



Ultrasound

- Your doctor will confirm how many babies you are carrying with an ultrasound. This is a test that shows a picture of the babies using sound waves.
 - The doctor can see the size and position of the babies.
 - The doctor can see how the babies are growing.
 - The test helps the doctor check if there are any problems with the placenta, uterus, and amniotic fluid.
- An ultrasound also helps guide the doctor doing an amniocentesis.

Amniocentesis

- This test is used to gather a small sample of fluid from the amniotic sac around the baby.
- The doctor uses a long thin needle.
- This sample can be used to test for abnormalities.
- Later in your pregnancy, the doctor can do the same test to test your babies' lungs.

Non-Stress Test (NST)

- Your doctor will probably order this test during your last 3 months of pregnancy.
- It checks the babies' heart rates and how they respond to movement.
- It also checks on any contractions you may be having.
- It tells the doctor about the health of your placenta and if it is transferring oxygen okay from your body to the babies'.
- Your doctor may want to order this test once or twice a week.

Biophysical Profile (BPP)

- This test uses ultrasound and an outside fetal monitor.
- It tells the doctor about how each baby is doing.
- 5 different areas are measured, and each is given a score. The scores are added together.
- The test does not hurt your babies.
- The test can be repeated as many times as your doctor thinks it should be.
- The test measures 5 elements; each element receives a score of "0" or "2."
A score of 8-10 is normal. The test measures:
 - Baby's breathing movements
 - Baby's body movements
 - Baby's muscle tone
 - Non-stress test (NST)
 - Amniotic fluid volume
- Good nutrition and good weight gain during your pregnancy can help keep you healthy and give your babies the best start in life.
- You will need increased amounts of many nutrients.
- The important ones include iron, calcium, zinc, protein, folic acid, and vitamin B6. Be careful with food choices, and take the multivitamin and mineral pill your doctor recommends.
- If you do this, you can meet your needs and your babies' needs.

The daily food guide (found in the *Nutrition during Pregnancy* section) will help you choose the right foods.

- Eat no less than the minimum number of servings from each group every day.
- If you are unable to drink milk, eat cheese or yogurt.

- If you have trouble digesting meats, try eating dry beans, nuts, or sunflower seeds.
- It may be easier to digest meats if you eat them in stews or soups, or in smaller quantities.

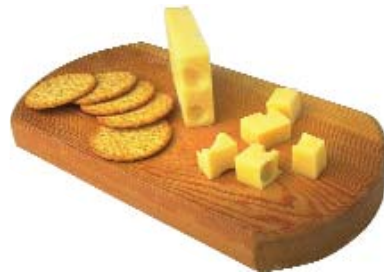
Make sure you drink extra water in addition to the food you eat.

- If you do not drink enough water, you may experience early labor.
- Not drinking enough water can cause urinary tract infections and constipation.
- Water can help reduce the additional body heat generated by your increased metabolism.
- Water helps reduce the likelihood of headaches and dry skin.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water each day.
- Try icy cold water, room temperature water, or bottled water to see what you like best. Add lemon or a splash of fruit juice to add flavor.
- Try drinking all the water before dinnertime.
- This will reduce the number of times you need to use the bathroom during the night.
- Most of the fluid you drink every day should be water.
- If you drink too many other types of fluids, you may have problems.
- Milk is low in iron. If you drink more than 1 or 2 quarts each day, you may be too full to eat the iron-rich foods you need.
- Do not drink more than 1 quart of fruit juice per day.
- Juices are high in sugar.
- Too much sugar can cause unhealthy changes in your blood sugar levels.
- Fizzy drinks can make you feel bloated or full.
- Do not drink more than 1 or 2 cups of coffee or tea each day.
- Drinks with caffeine like coffee and tea can make you feel nervous, upset, and tired.
- Caffeine drinks will cause you to urinate more often.
- You may become dehydrated.



The Way You Eat May Change

- Eat 3 meals and 4 healthy snacks each day.
 - This will help you gain the weight you need while you are pregnant.
 - It will also help your babies to grow and develop.
 - Have your snacks in the middle of the morning, in the middle of the afternoon, after your dinner, and before you go to bed. These snacks should be almost like a small meal. Some examples of snacks include cereal with milk and fruit or a sandwich with a glass of milk.
 - You should be eating every 2 hours during the day.
- You need extra protein during your pregnancy to help your babies grow.
 - Eat foods with extra protein.
 - Foods that contain extra protein are meat, fish, poultry, eggs, and dairy products.
- You need iron to keep you from having anemia.
 - You need to eat iron-rich food 2 times every day.
 - Beef, pork, and liver are also excellent sources of iron.
- Food with carbohydrates provides you with energy.
 - Fruit, milk, and refined sugar have simple carbohydrates.
 - Rice, corn, potatoes, and wheat have complex carbohydrates.
- The part of a carbohydrate that you cannot digest is called fiber.
 - Fiber helps you digest your food.
 - It will also help you have regular bowel movements.
 - Foods that have a lot of fiber are raw fruits and vegetables, and breads and cereals made from bran or whole-grains.
- Carbohydrate foods eaten with protein foods will help you to keep your blood sugar levels good while you are pregnant.
 - Some ways you can do this are by eating: crackers with cheese, cereal with milk, or whole-wheat bread with peanut butter.



- Dairy foods are called the perfect food.
 - They are a good way to get calcium, vitamins, and minerals.
 - They are complete proteins.
 - But, they do not have iron.
 - Drink a quart of whole milk every day.
 - Warm up the milk if you have trouble drinking it cold. You can add chocolate, almond, or vanilla flavor to make it taste good.
 - Ice cream is a good way to eat dairy foods.
 - Dairy foods make good bedtime snacks. It is digested slowly and will keep you full during the night.
 - Good bedtime snacks are ice cream, milk and cereal, or even a grilled cheese sandwich.



Weight Gain

- The amount of weight you will need to gain depends on how many babies you are carrying.
- It depends on your weight and height before pregnancy.
- If you begin your pregnancy underweight, your doctor may tell you to gain enough weight for you to be the normal weight range for your height.
- Your doctor will also tell you to gain additional pounds for the number of babies you are carrying.
- If you begin your pregnancy overweight, your doctor may tell you to gain 10 pounds less than what is the normal weight range for your height and the number of babies you are carrying.
- The amount of weight you gain depends on:
 - What types and amounts of food you eat.
 - How much activity and exercise you get.

It is very important for you to eat healthy foods when you are pregnant. Follow the daily food guide in the *Nutrition during Pregnancy* section.

- Here are some guidelines for total weight gain during pregnancy:

Twins	General guideline is 40 to 50 pounds
Triplets	General guideline is 50 to 60 pounds
Quadruplets	General guideline is 65 to 80 pounds

Adapted from B. Luke and T. Eberlein. *When You're Expecting Twins, Triplets, or Quads*. New York: Harper Collins, 1999. With permission.

- When you are carrying more than 1 baby:
 - It is important for you to gain most of your weight by 20 to 24 weeks if you are having more than 1 baby.
 - The weight you gain early in your pregnancy will help your babies grow and develop. This is more important than the weight you gain after 28 weeks.
 - It is harder for you to gain weight after 28 weeks. As your babies are growing, you may feel full long before you have eaten the calories you need.
 - If you were underweight when you became pregnant or have lost weight from illness or morning sickness, try to gain weight before the 24th week.
- Try to gain weight at a steady rate.
- Here are some guidelines for weight gain during each part of your pregnancy based on the number of babies you are carrying.

HOW MANY BABIES	BEFORE 24 WEEKS GAIN EACH WEEK	TOTAL WEIGHT GAIN BY 24 WEEKS	AFTER 24 WEEKS GAIN EACH WEEK	FULL PREGNANCY WEIGHT GAIN
1	½ pound	12 pounds	1 pound	25–30 pounds
2	1 pound	24 pounds	2 pounds	40–50 pounds
3	1½ pounds	36 pounds	2½ pounds	50–60 pounds
4	2 pounds	50 pounds	3 pounds	65–80 pounds

Activity Restrictions

- You may feel tired and upset at times while you are carrying more than 1 baby.
- If you are feeling tired, early labor could begin.
- When you are about halfway through your pregnancy (about 20 weeks), ask your doctor if you should cut down on your daily activities.



- If you are on your feet a lot, there is pressure on your cervix. This can cause early contractions and dilation.
 - Lie down to ease this pressure.
 - This will also make blood circulation to the kidneys better and will help you eliminate excess fluids.
 - You must take care of yourself and save your energy for your growing babies.
- Your doctor may tell you to go on bedrest if you are carrying 3 or more babies. The amount of bedrest depends on your special needs.
 - The doctor may tell you to rest for 2 hours 2 times a day.
 - The doctor may tell you to go on complete bedrest.
 - Ask your doctor for a list of activities you need to avoid.
 - Limit your activity by letting others help you do housework and shopping.
 - You need help now so you can protect the health of your unborn babies.
 - Your doctor may recommend water immersion therapy if needed.
 - This therapy has you relax in water for short periods of time. Your doctor will give you more information about this.
 - **Soaking in hot water and the use of hot tubs and saunas is never recommended during pregnancy.**

Tips for Improving Your Physical Comfort and Safety

- Make sure your posture is good to help avoid back strain.
- Try not to make sudden or *jerky* movements which add stress to your abdomen and back.
- Don't do a lot of stair climbing, stooping, and bending.
- Squat instead of bending at the waist.
- Use a pillow to support your lower back while sitting.
- Do not stand when you can sit.

- Put your feet up. This will help increase circulation. It will help reduce minor swelling of your feet and ankles.
- Try not to lift, carry, or push heavy objects. Do not lift more than 35 pounds at a time. Ask young children to climb up on your lap. Try to limit lifting and carrying them.
- Use your arms and legs to push yourself back up from a sitting position.
- Rest or sleep lying on your side. This will help blood circulate to your babies. You may find it more comfortable to bend your knees and place a pillow between them when you are lying down. Use your arms to push yourself up before standing.
- Help support your belly and shoulders by using more pillows. If you are still working, rest during and after work. Reduce the physical demands as much as you can during the day.
- Always wear your seat belt. Your doctor will tell you to wear the shoulder strap of the seat belt and adjust the lower part of the belt to fit below your pregnant belly. If you wear the seat belt too high or too loose, it can cause injury to both you and your unborn babies.
- Ask your doctor about sexual activity during your pregnancy. There may be times during your pregnancy when intercourse is not a good idea.
- It is very important for you to take care of yourself. If you feel tired, rest. Ask your husband, partner, children, or friends for help when you need it.

Possible Complications

Early Labor

- Early labor can happen before 37 weeks of pregnancy.
- Early labor happens more in multiple pregnancies (twins or more).
 - Over 57% of twins and 93% of triplets deliver early in the United States.
 - Reduce your risk of early labor. Follow your doctor’s advice about rest, activity, nutrition, and drinking fluids.

Call your doctor right away if you feel any of the following:

- 4 or more contractions or *tightening* of the uterus in an hour.
- Cramping (like your period).
- Stomach cramps with or without diarrhea.
- Pelvic pressure (comes and goes or is constant) and does not ease when you change positions. It may feel like the baby is *pushing down*.

- Low, dull ache across your lower back that does not go away with rest.
- Any change in your normal vaginal discharge.
- Vaginal bleeding.
- Thigh pain or discomfort.
- General feeling that *something is not right*.

Early labor can be stopped and delivery can be delayed if it is found early enough.

- The longer you can carry your babies, the healthier they will be.
- Sometimes the water breaks before the 37th week. This may happen without contractions.
 - Call your doctor right away if you notice any slow leakage or sudden gush of fluid from your vagina.
 - Your doctor will tell you to rest to relieve pressure on your cervix.
 - Your doctor may give you a tocolytic medicine to treat this early labor.
 - It may be given by mouth, injection, or intravenously.
 - Your doctor may also give you steroids to help increase the infants' lung growth.
 - Your doctor may ask you to use a uterine activity monitor so your contractions can be checked. It is hard to know if you are having contractions or if the babies are just moving around. Contractions may not be painful. Tell your doctor if you have more than 4 contractions per hour.

Preeclampsia

- Preeclampsia is a condition that you can develop during the late part of your pregnancy.

The symptoms are:

- High blood pressure of 140/90 or higher.
- Protein in the urine.
- Swelling of the hands and face.
- This condition can cause liver, kidney, brain, and eye damage, bleeding problems, and seizures in the mother.
- The babies can have poor growth in the uterus because of bad blood flow through the placenta.

- It is very important that you keep your regular doctor appointments. The doctor will monitor your blood pressure and weight gain to make sure everything is okay. The doctor will check your urine.

- If you have any of these problems, call your doctor:
 - Swelling of the face and hands
 - Severe headache
 - Blurred vision or seeing spots
 - Sudden weight gain of more than a pound a day
 - Pain in the upper right part of the abdomen

It is very important to keep regular doctor appointments to monitor your blood pressure and weight gain, have urine tests, and to notify the doctor of any problems.

- If you have symptoms, your doctor will determine the treatment plan.
 - If you have mild symptoms with nothing else, your doctor will probably tell you to take it easy and go on bed rest.
 - If your symptoms are more serious, the doctor may put you on strict bed rest and give you medicine to help lower your blood pressure.

Diabetes during Pregnancy

- Diabetes is a common problem during pregnancy.
- It can happen during the last half of pregnancy.
- It usually goes away when the babies are born.
- Women carrying more than 1 baby are 2 to 3 times more likely to develop diabetes.
- During your regular doctor visits, your urine will be tested to make sure your sugar is okay.
- You will also be checked for diabetes between 26 and 28 weeks using a blood test.
- Your doctor may check you earlier since you are carrying more than 1 baby. If the results of the test are not normal, additional screening will be done.
- If you have diabetes during pregnancy, you will receive information about diet and exercise.

- Your doctor or nurse will teach you how to check your blood sugar.
- Your blood sugar needs to be under control, so the babies do not grow larger than they should. Your babies may have low blood sugar levels and possibly other problems after they are born.

Level 3 Nursery

- A hospital with a level 3 nursery is the best place to deliver your multiple pregnancies.
 - A level 3 nursery has specialists and modern equipment to take the best care of you and your babies.
 - Ask your doctor about the hospital where you will have your babies to see if there is a level 3 nursery.

Labor and Delivery

- Talk to your doctor about the way you will deliver your babies.
 - He will decide if you can deliver your babies vaginally or by cesarean section.
- He will make the decision by looking at the following facts:
 - Your age and the age of the babies.
 - The position of the babies in your body.
 - The location of your placenta.
 - If the babies are having any problems.
- About half of all twins are born by cesarean section.
- Most triplets and quads are born by cesarean section.

Talk with your doctor about the type of birth you will have.

Caring for More Than 1 Baby at a Time

- Breast milk is the best food for your babies.
- If you plan to breastfeed your babies, your body will make extra milk so you have enough for your babies.
- You must eat good, healthy foods and drink plenty of fluids so your babies have good nutrition.

- If you are breastfeeding, you will need to eat an extra 500 calories a day.
- If the babies are born early, your breast milk may be pumped and kept for later use.
- If you are a new mom of more than 1 baby, you will need help, especially during the 1st few weeks at home.
- Plan for the help you will need ahead of time.
- Your babies' father may want to take a few weeks off from work to help with:
 - Feeding
 - Diaper changes
 - Laundry
 - Cooking
 - Shopping
 - Other chores
 - Ask your friends or neighbors to help you with shopping or childcare.
 - Ask your doctor for the names of support groups that can help you adjust to having more than 1 baby.
 - You can also find more places to contact for help in the *Additional Resources for YOU* section.