

COMPLICATIONS OF PREGNANCY

SPONTANEOUS ABORTION/MISCARRIAGE

Five out of every 100 babies are born with some genetic defect. Nature itself takes care of the worst genetic mistakes. Many pregnancies end, usually because of genetic defects, before the mother even realizes she is pregnant. Approximately one in four of all conceptions fail to reach the point at which a baby can survive. The natural expelling of the embryo or fetus before it has reached the point at which it can survive outside of the mother's body is referred to as a miscarriage. Miscarriage usually occurs before the sixth month of pregnancy and most frequently during the first three months. In many instances, it occurs before the pregnancy has even been recognized by the woman.

In a medical sense, physicians refer to a miscarriage as a spontaneous abortion. It differs from an induced abortion, which is purposefully performed on a woman to end a pregnancy.

About three out of four spontaneous abortions occur as nature tries to get rid of an imperfect embryo due to a chromosomal abnormality. For this reason, a couple who have had one miscarriage should not be discouraged from attempting pregnancy again. Miscarriage is a common occurrence.

PREMATURE DELIVERY

A premature delivery is one that takes place before prenatal development is complete. It can be caused by a birth defect. "Premature" refers to being born two to three months early. Some premature babies also have a low birth weight (less than 5 1/2 pounds). Premature babies might have a variety of health problems such as infection and lung ailments. These babies require special care.

STILLBIRTH

A stillbirth refers to a fetus that has appeared to develop normally but for some reason is born dead, usually during the third trimester. In some instances, the physician is able to diagnose the reason for the stillbirth; in other instances, the actual problem is never diagnosed.

EFFECTS OF SMOKING

When a pregnant woman smokes tobacco, nicotine and carbon monoxide enter her bloodstream. These chemicals then enter the baby's bloodstream. Smoking robs oxygen from the fetus, causing the fetal heartbeat to speed up.

Women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely to have miscarriages, to deliver prematurely, and to have a low-birth-weight baby. Low-birth-weight babies are more likely to develop health problems and more likely to die in early infancy than babies of normal weight.

Babies of smoking parents are more likely to develop respiratory infections during the first year of life. Circulation problems and heart problems as adults are often experienced by children whose mothers smoked during pregnancy. This is caused by damaged blood vessels.

TOXEMIA/PREGNANCY-INDUCED HYPERTENSION (PIH)

Toxemia is a condition that affects the woman's kidneys, heart, or blood circulation. It may include swollen hands, face, or feet and a rapid weight gain of about 3 pounds per week. Severe headaches, blurred vision, convulsions, coma, or even death may also be symptoms. Six to 8 percent of pregnant women suffer with this condition (one in 1,500). This is a dangerous condition for both the mother and the fetus and generally occurs in the last trimester of pregnancy.

GESTATIONAL DIABETES

Diabetes caused by pregnancy. After the baby is delivered, the mother's body will return to normal.

THROMBOPHLEBITIS

This condition refers to blood clots in the legs due to the increased clotting ability of the blood during pregnancy.

VERICOSE VEINS

This condition refers to swollen, sore veins in the legs.

PLACENTA PREVIA

This condition is due to the placenta being low in the uterus. This can cause complications at birth because the placenta blocks the birth of the baby. This occurs in one out of 200 pregnancies. In the case of placenta previa, the placenta must separate from the uterine wall before the birth of the baby. This leaves the baby without oxygen as it descends through the birth canal and until the baby can breathe on his/her own.