



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists

# FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
FAQ092  
PREGNANCY

## Having Twins

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### How do twins occur?

Twins can be either fraternal or identical. Most are **fraternal twins**—each develops from a separate egg and sperm. Fraternal twins each have their own **placenta** and **amniotic sac**. Because each twin develops from the union of a different egg and a different sperm, these twins may not look alike. The twins can be boys, girls, or one of each.

**Identical twins** are more rare. They occur when a fertilized egg splits early in pregnancy and develops into two fetuses. Identical twins may share a placenta, but each baby usually has its own amniotic sac. Identical twins are the same sex and have the same blood type, hair color, and eye color, and they look very much alike.

### Are certain people more likely to have twins than others?

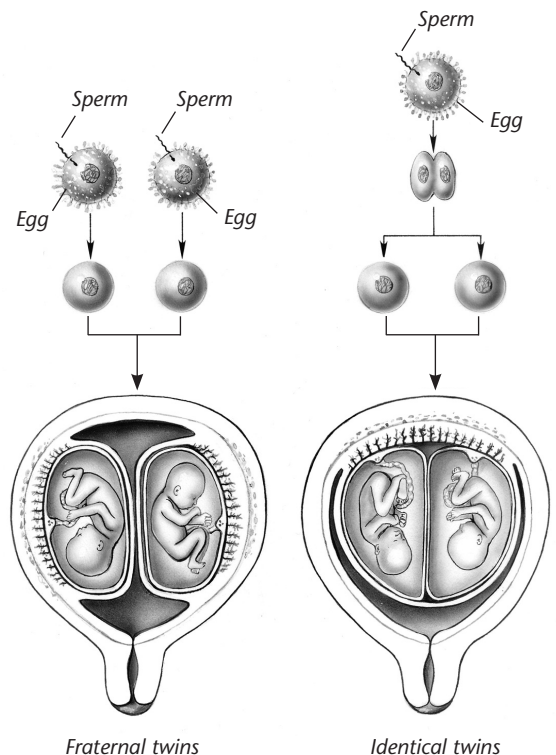
Some families are more likely than others to have fraternal twins. Women who take fertility drugs or have **in vitro fertilization** also have a greater chance of having twins.

### How are twins diagnosed?

Most twins are diagnosed before delivery. Your health care provider may suspect that you are carrying twins if your uterus grows more quickly or is larger than expected. However, twins usually are diagnosed by using an **ultrasound** exam. Ultrasound also may be able to tell if the twins are identical or fraternal.

### Do women who are pregnant with twins need to eat more?

When pregnant with twins, you will need to eat more than if you were carrying one baby. If you are of average weight, you will need to eat about 2,700 calories every day.



Fraternal twins come from two eggs and have separate placentas (left). Identical twins come from one egg and may share the same placenta (right).

You should gain more weight when carrying twins than if you were having only one baby. Plan to gain 35–45 pounds. In the first half of pregnancy, you should gain about 1 pound per week. In the second half, you should aim for a little more than 1 pound each week. If you are underweight, you may need to gain more. If you are overweight, you may need to gain less.

### Are there additional risks of complications in twin pregnancies?

The risk of certain complications is higher in a twin pregnancy. The mother is more likely to develop high blood pressure or anemia, and the babies are more likely to be born small. The mother also is at increased risk for preterm labor. Sometimes these problems can be prevented with early detection and care.

### Is preterm labor more common in twin pregnancies?

Preterm labor—labor that starts before the end of 37 weeks of pregnancy—is the most common problem of multiple pregnancy. Preterm labor can result in preterm birth. About half of all twins are born preterm (see the FAQs [Preterm Labor](#) and [Early Preterm Birth](#)).

### What is preeclampsia?

Preeclampsia is a condition of pregnancy in which there is high blood pressure and protein in the urine (see the FAQ [High Blood Pressure During Pregnancy](#)). Preeclampsia can be mild or severe.

This condition is harmful because it can reduce the blood flow through the vessels in the uterus and deprive the babies of oxygen and nutrients. As a result, the fetuses may not grow as much as they should. It also can damage your heart, liver, kidneys, and brain. In severe cases, preeclampsia may cause seizures and threaten your life. The babies may need to be delivered early if your blood pressure becomes too high.

### What growth problems may twins experience?

Twins are more likely to be smaller than average. Ultrasound often is used to check the growth and the amount of amniotic fluid of each baby.

Twins are called **discordant** if one is much smaller than the other. Discordant twins are more likely to have problems during pregnancy and after birth. Twins may be discordant because of poor functioning of the placenta or **twin-twin transfusion syndrome (TTS)**.

TTS can develop when identical twins share a placenta. The blood passes from one twin to the other through their shared placenta. The twin that gives the blood will be very small and have too little amniotic fluid. The other twin can have too much blood and amniotic fluid. Some of the extra fluid may need to be removed. If TTS is severe, the twins may have to be delivered early or, in rare cases, they may die.

### How can the death of one fetus affect a twin pregnancy?

In some twin pregnancies, one of the babies dies. If this happens in early pregnancy, you may have some spotting or bleeding from your vagina. This does not harm you or the other baby.

Later in pregnancy, death of one of the babies is more serious, but often you can still have one healthy child. Losing a baby when you are still pregnant with another can be very hard for you and your family. It can help to talk with your health care provider, nurse, or a counselor about your feelings.

### How are twins delivered?

Twins usually can be born vaginally if they both are in the head-down position. A vaginal birth also may be possible when the lower twin is in the head-down position but the higher twin is not. Once the first twin is born, the other twin can sometimes be turned or delivered with feet or buttocks first. When this cannot be done, the second twin is delivered by **cesarean delivery**. When the lower twin is not in the head-down position, both twins are delivered by cesarean delivery.

## Glossary

**Amniotic Sac:** A fluid-filled sac in the mother's uterus where the fetus develops.

**Cesarean Delivery:** A surgical procedure in which the babies are delivered through an incision in the mother's abdomen and uterus.

**Discordant:** A large difference in the size of fetuses in a multiple pregnancy.

**Fraternal Twins:** Twins that have developed from more than one fertilized egg; they are not genetically identical and each has its own placenta and amniotic sac.

**Identical Twins:** Twins that have developed from a single fertilized egg; they are usually genetically identical and may or may not share the same placenta and amniotic sac.

**In Vitro Fertilization:** A procedure in which an egg is removed from a woman's ovary, fertilized in a dish in a laboratory with the man's sperm, and then reintroduced into the woman's uterus to achieve a pregnancy.

**Placenta:** Tissue that provides nourishment to and takes away waste from the fetus.

**Twin-Twin Transfusion Syndrome (TTS):** A condition of identical twin fetuses when the blood passes from one twin to the other through a shared placenta.

**Ultrasound:** A test that uses sound waves to examine the fetus.

**If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.**

**FAQ092:** Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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