



Most Common Complications During Pregnancy

Advice for what to do when there are
problems during pregnancy

Written by Tonya Ellis

Katy mom Marissa Morgan's first pregnancy began typically, but 29 weeks in, things changed. "I had what felt like a runner's cramp on my left side," she says. When Morgan went to her doctor they noticed she was having timed contractions. Diagnosis: preterm labor. If not stopped, her baby's life was in danger.

Pregnancy progresses normally for most women, but some experience complications beyond morning sickness and stretch marks.

1. Preterm Labor

Healthy babies are born 37 to 40 weeks after conception. Anything earlier spells trouble. "There are many ramifications of delivering a baby early, such as respiratory, heart, brain, and temperature instability issues," says Matthew Isom, DO, an obstetrician and gynecologist with the Kelsey-Seybold Cinco Ranch Clinic. You risk delivering early if you're pregnant with multiples, have fibroids, are a younger or an older mom, have had closely spaced pregnancies, smoke, or haven't gained enough weight while pregnant. Medications and bed rest can stop preterm labor.

2. Preeclampsia

High blood pressure, protein in the urine, and a puffy face and hands, are signs of this serious complication. Dr. Isom adds, "This is one of the most dangerous diseases we encounter in obstetrics. There is no prevention per se, however, closely watching maternal weight gain, salt intake, are things that help." Since the symptoms of preeclampsia can be silent, not missing prenatal checkups is key.

3. Miscarriage

Losing a baby is devastating, and there are many causes of miscarriage, including infection, bleeding disorders, uterine issues, advanced maternal age, and genetics. "I tell my patients that there is usually nothing that they did to cause the miscarriage," Dr. Isom says. "When the sperm and egg meet, there are millions of things that have to line up just right. If something doesn't line up correctly, things won't progress past a certain point."

4. Placenta Previa

The baby's placenta partially or completely covers mom's cervix with this complication. This can result in severe bleeding before or during delivery, or preterm delivery. Bed rest and decreased activity are ordered. If the placenta doesn't move away from the cervix on its own before the birth, the baby is delivered by cesarean section.

5. Gestational Diabetes

Gestational diabetes leads to large babies, which can make delivery risky. Affected moms may develop diabetes after the baby is born. Smoking, advanced maternal age, family history of diabetes, non-white ethnicity, and obesity are risk factors. Eating a healthy diet and watching pregnancy weight gain can help to prevent it.

When to Call Your Doctor

Warning signs that something may be wrong during pregnancy

- ▶ Vaginal bleeding or spotting
- ▶ Your baby is moving or kicking less than usual
- ▶ Severe headache
- ▶ Sudden swelling
- ▶ Sharp pain on one side or intense pain
- ▶ Gush of fluid
- ▶ Contractions coming more often than 10 minutes apart

Source: pregnancy.about.com

6. Braxton Hicks Contractions

These false labor contractions, or "practice contractions," can be felt sometime around 20 weeks. Unlike true labor contractions, they are sporadic, don't increase in intensity, and stop if you get up and move around. Experts recommend drinking lots of water, avoiding caffeine, and changing positions to help manage any discomfort.

7. Ectopic Pregnancy

In this life-threatening condition, the baby grows outside the uterus, most commonly in the fallopian tubes. "Any pregnant patient who presents early in the pregnancy with abdominal pain and abnormal bleeding needs to be evaluated for this condition," advises Dr. Isom. Treatment may be surgical or require medication. If the fallopian tube has ruptured emergency surgery is usually required.

To stop her preterm labor, Morgan was given medications and put on bed rest for two months. Her daughter Charlotte, now 3, was born healthy. Two years later, Morgan and her husband Clay welcomed their son James, age 1, also preterm. "I made it to 36 weeks and five days," she says. "I was so in love with him. We had some scares, but he's perfectly fine." **KM**

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How Common Are Pregnancy Concerns?

Percentage of women who suffer various pregnancy complications

Braxton Hicks Contractions	90-100%	Premature Birth	7-10%	Ectopic Pregnancy	2%
Morning Sickness	75%	Gestational Diabetes	2-10%	Placenta Previa	1%
Miscarriage of confirmed pregnancies	10%	Preeclampsia	5%		

Sources: babycenter.com, amazingpregnancy.com