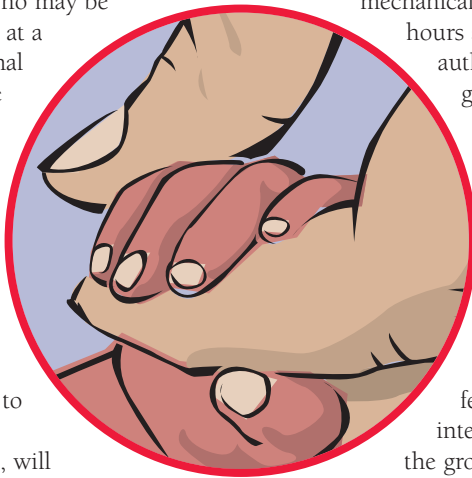


High-Risk Infants

Premature or preterm infants (infants who are born before the 37th week of pregnancy) and **low-birth-weight infants** (infants born at a lower than normal weight—less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces) are at higher risk for a number of medical complications than infants carried to full term and born at a normal weight.

One way to reduce the chances of having a baby who may be born preterm or at a lower than normal weight is to take good care of yourself during your pregnancy. Proper prenatal care, which includes regularly scheduled visits to your doctor and proper nutrition, will give your baby a better



chance for a healthy start to life.

An article in the October 25, 2000, issue of *JAMA* discusses the effectiveness of a program that provides comprehensive follow-up care (more extensive than routine follow-up care) to high-risk infants. The infants were considered at high risk because they had a very low weight at birth (less than 3 pounds, 5 ounces) and needed a mechanical ventilator within 48 hours after their birth. The authors found that the group receiving **comprehensive follow-up care** had fewer life-threatening illnesses, fewer hospital admissions, fewer intensive care admissions, and fewer days in the intensive care unit than the group receiving routine follow-up care.

INCREASING THE CHANCES OF HAVING A HEALTHY BABY:

- Get regular **prenatal care** (medical care for you and your fetus before you give birth)

At the point that you decide that you want to become pregnant and for the duration of the pregnancy you should:

- Eat a nutritious diet
- Take a vitamin supplement that includes 400 micrograms of **folic acid** (a B vitamin that plays an important role in the proper development of the fetus, especially of the fetus's nervous system and formation of blood cells)
- Do not smoke and avoid secondhand smoke
- Do not drink any alcohol
- Do not take drugs or supplements unless your doctor approves their use

There are a number of other precautions you should take at the point that you decide that you want to become pregnant and for the duration of your pregnancy. Your prenatal care doctor will inform you of these.

Additional Sources: March of Dimes, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Academy of Pediatrics, The AMA Complete Guide to Your Children's Health, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine

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MEDICAL PROBLEMS OF HIGH-RISK INFANTS:

Preterm infants who have a lower than normal birth weight are at higher than normal risk of experiencing the following medical conditions:

- Respiratory conditions – problems with lungs and problems breathing
- Neurological conditions – problems with the brain and nervous system
- Gastrointestinal conditions – problems with the stomach and intestines
- Developmental problems – problems developing normally
- Slowed growth

MEDICAL PROBLEMS OF MOTHERS THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE RISK OF LOW BIRTH WEIGHT

- High blood pressure
- Certain types of infections
- Kidney or lung problems
- Problems with the reproductive system

Let your doctor know if you have any of the above conditions. Proper management of these conditions can help ensure that you have a healthy baby.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Send business-size self-addressed stamped envelope to:
ACOG Resource Center
Good Health Before Pregnancy: Preconceptional Care (AP056)
PO Box 96920
Washington, DC 20090-6920
or www.acog.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA Patient Pages*, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

