

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH TWIN PREGNANCIES

Our goal is to help you build your family – one healthy baby at a time. This goal may be different than yours. Research has shown that many infertile couples desire twins. Having twins allows the couple to “complete” their family more quickly and saves the cost of doing another cycle. However, what is often overlooked are the risks of a twin pregnancy.

A twin pregnancy is a high risk pregnancy.

The table below lists the **risks to the babies** of a twin pregnancy compared to a pregnancy with one baby (singleton).

Risks of Twins Compared to Risk of Singleton Pregnancies*			
	Singletons	Twins	Increased risk with twins
Low birth weight less than 5.5 lbs	5.9 %	53.1 %	9 times ↑ risk
Very low birth weight less than 3.3 lbs	0.7 %	8.2 %	10 times ↑ risk
Prematurity less than 32 weeks	3.1 %	11.0 %	3-4 times ↑ risk
Prematurity less than 28 weeks	0.3 %	3.7 %	10 times ↑ risk
Still birth (death before birth)	0.4 %	1.4 %	3 times ↑ risk
Neonatal death (death in 1 st month of life)	0.3 %	2.3 %	8 times ↑ risk
Infant death (death in 1 st year of life)	0.9 %	4.9 %	5 times ↑ risk
Malformation rate	2.7 %	3.5 %	1.5 times ↑ risk
Severe handicap rate	2.0 %	3.4 %	1.5 times ↑ risk

The average length of pregnancy in a twin pregnancy is 36 weeks. Full term pregnancies are 40 weeks. Since this is only an average, many twin pregnancies are delivered much earlier than 36 weeks. Because twins are often born prematurely, the risk to the long-term health of these infants is increased. This includes a 7 times increased risk of cerebral palsy. NICU (Intensive Care) hospital care is seen in more that 25% of twin and in more than 75% of triplet pregnancies.

Twin pregnancies also pose a **greater risk for the mother** during the pregnancy as shown in the table below. Other risks include premature labor sometimes requiring prolonged bed rest during the pregnancy.

Maternal Risks in Twin Pregnancy*	
Hypertension (high blood pressure)	2-3 x higher risk
Heavy bleeding after delivery	3-4.5 x higher risk
Cesarean section	3 x higher risk
Maternal death (rare even with twins)	2-3 x higher risk

*modified from a handout used at the University of Iowa IVF centre for their study by Kresowik et al., (2011), Fertility & Sterility, 96: 1367