

# Preterm labour and birth

Information for the public

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[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

## Early labour and birth: the care you should expect

About 8 babies out of every 100 in the UK are born before the 37th week of pregnancy. This is called preterm (or premature) birth. Preterm labour usually starts by itself, although sometimes a preterm birth is planned if it's thought to be safest for the baby or the mother. There are risks to the baby from being born early, and the earlier a baby is born, the higher their chances of health problems at birth and later in life. Choosing the right treatments to help stop or slow down early labour can reduce these risks.

We want this guideline to make a difference to women, their babies and families by making sure care teams know:

- when to offer women treatment with progesterone (a hormone) or a cervical 'stitch' called a cerclage to help stop early labour
- how to diagnose when a woman's waters have broken early and which antibiotics to offer to prevent an infection
- which medicines are best for each woman and her baby when early labour is starting
- when to safely clamp and cut a preterm baby's umbilical cord.

## Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns. They should also:

- discuss with you early in pregnancy whether you could be at risk of preterm labour, and explain the care you will be offered
- make sure you know the signs of preterm labour to look out for
- explain the possible problems that could affect your baby and the care they are likely to need after they're born
- give you a chance to talk to a specialist about care for your baby.

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your care team.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

## Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about preterm labour and birth.

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Bliss](#), [hello@bliss.org.uk](mailto:hello@bliss.org.uk)
- [National Childbirth Trust](#), 0300 330 0700
- [Sands](#) (Stillbirth & neonatal death charity), 0800 164 3322
- [Tommy's](#), 0800 0147 800

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by preterm labour and birth and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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