

# healthy expectations - WEEK 20

## You're Halfway There!

Congratulations! You have reached the halfway point in your pregnancy. Your baby is developing quickly and is now between 5 1/2 and 6 1/2 inches long, and weighs about 9 ounces. His/her skin is thickening now, and a white, waxy secretion called vernix is now covering the skin to protect it from the amniotic fluid in the womb. Hair is beginning to grow on the scalp and fine hair called lanugo is growing all around the body, helping to secure the vernix.

Your physician will likely order an ultrasound at this point to verify development, check weight, measurements and any possible defects. You may even be able to find out if your baby is a boy or a girl if you want to!

## Fetal Movement

Sixteen weeks is about the time many women start to feel their baby move. If you don't feel movement yet - don't panic. Movement is usually felt between 16 and 20 weeks, and in some cases, as late as 22 weeks for first-time moms. For 'veteran' moms who have already had one or more children, movement is usually felt earlier - mainly because they understand what they are feeling.

Early fetal movement, also called "quickenings", is often described as a 'fluttering' or 'swooshing' feeling in the lower abdomen. At first, you may mistake this feeling for gas bubbles or digestive movements, however, in time, as movements increase and become more persistent, you will learn the difference.

Throughout the latter part of the second trimester, kicks will become more frequent and you may find that your baby is regularly active at certain times of the day. It's a good idea to monitor your baby's movement once consistent patterns begin. Significant changes or decreases in your baby's movement may signal a problem. If you notice any significant changes, contact your physician immediately.

## Preterm Labor

Preterm labor is defined as occurring before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Risk factors include:

- Genital tract infections or STDs like gonorrhea or chlamydia
- Enlarged uterus caused by excess amniotic fluid or multiple fetus pregnancies
- Placental problems like abruption or placenta previa
- Chronic maternal diseases like diabetes, lupus, sickle cell anemia and others
- Cervical abnormalities or structural insufficiencies

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## Meet Our Obstetricians:

### Michelle Covalt, MD

Dr. Covalt completed her residency in June 2010 at the University of Tennessee Memphis with additional training in DaVinci Robotics, Endometrial Ablation, Essure, and Centering in Pregnancy. During her residency, service to inner-city youth also became important to her, and she hopes to incorporate adolescent care into her practice. Dr. Covalt earned her MD at MSU College of Human Medicine in East Lansing, MI. When she's not in the office, she looks forward to taking up outdoor activities such as camping, hiking, skiing and soaking in the hot tub.



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Other factors that may increase your chances of preterm labor include:

- Not gaining enough weight during pregnancy
- History of having preterm birth(s)
- Age under 17 or over 35 years old
- Smoking, alcohol or drug abuse during pregnancy
- Giving birth within 18 months of your last child or getting pregnant within 6 months of giving birth
- African American ethnicity

Preterm labor occurs in approximately 12 percent of all pregnancies in the United States, and about a quarter of these are intentionally induced. Your physician may induce preterm labor if it is medically necessary, including when your baby has stopped growing, is bigger than normal due to gestational diabetes or some other factor that may make vaginal delivery harmful or impossible, or in other situations where a serious medical condition is present.

## Signs of Preterm Labor

- Vaginal bleeding and/or spotting
- Abdominal Pain or cramps
- Four or more contractions in an hour
- Increased vaginal discharge or discharge that is mucus-like, watery or contains any amount of blood
- Increased pressure in the lower abdomen, as though the baby is pushing downward
- Water breaks or leaking of amniotic fluid

## What to Do if You Suspect Preterm Labor

Contact your physician immediately if you experience ANY of the above symptoms - do not wait. You will most likely be sent to the hospital for further evaluation and testing to determine if you are going into labor. At the hospital, the staff may:

- Do a speculum exam to check for membrane tearing
- Take urine and swab tests of the vagina and cervix to check for infection
- Perform a Fetal fibronectin (fFN) test to check for increased protein that may signal that the amniotic sac is detaching from the uterine lining
- Complete swab tests of the vagina and cervix to check for infection
- Monitor contractions and baby's heart rate

## Affects of Preterm Labor on Baby

If your baby is born prematurely, his/her condition depends partially on how close the birth occurs to your due date. The risk of long and short term health problems is reduced, the closer to your due date your baby is born. Babies born extremely prematurely, as early as 24 weeks, will usually require neonatal intensive care and monitoring. Babies born after 34 weeks of pregnancy are usually the most healthy and are also less likely to develop health problems.

Avoiding unnecessary risks like using drugs, smoking and consuming alcohol during your pregnancy will help to prevent preterm labor and keep your baby healthy. Keeping up with physician appointments and eating a healthy, balanced diet can also reduce the chance of preterm labor.

## Resources

[www.babycenter.com](http://www.babycenter.com)  
[www.cshpwomenshealth.net](http://www.cshpwomenshealth.net)  
[www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/188\\_1080.asp](http://www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/188_1080.asp)  
[www.webmd.com/baby/tc/preterm-labor-topic-overview](http://www.webmd.com/baby/tc/preterm-labor-topic-overview)