

Risk Factors for Premature Birth

A host of behavioral, psychosocial, socio-demographic, medical/pregnancy conditions and biological factors are associated with risk for preterm birth (see table). Research suggests that an overall healthy lifestyle is associated with reducing this risk (Behrman & Butler, 2007). More research is needed provide a better understanding of the complex pathways leading to preterm birth outcomes.

Reference

Behrman, R.E. & Butler, A.S. (Eds.) (2007). *Preterm birth: Causes, consequences and prevention*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

Risk Factors Associated with Preterm Birth	
Category	Risk Factors
Behavioral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tobacco use • Alcohol use • Illicit drug use • Nutrition (low pre-pregnancy weight, obesity, poor diet, inappropriate supplementation) • Demanding employment conditions • Inadequate or excessively physical activity • Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) • Douching
Psychosocial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress, especially chronic and catastrophic stress • Anxiety, especially regarding the pregnancy • Depression • Racism • Inadequate social support • Lack of personal resources (self-esteem, mastery, perceived control, optimism) • Unintended pregnancy
Sociodemographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal age (adolescents and women over 35) • Single (unmarried or not cohabitating) • Race and ethnicity • Poverty • Adverse neighborhood conditions

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Risk Factors Associated with Preterm Birth (Continued)	
Category	Risk Factors
Medical/Pregnancy conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic hypertension • Systemic lupus erythematosus • Restrictive lung disease • Hyperthyroidism • Pregestational diabetes mellitus • Cardiac disease • Asthma • Gestational diabetes mellitus • Pregestational renal disorders • Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy • Underweight or obese • Family history of preterm birth • Short interpregnancy interval • Assisted reproductive technology-related treatments, especially those resulting in multiple gestation
Biological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflammation/Infection • Overdistension of the uterus caused by excess amniotic fluid, twins or higher order pregnancy • Bleeding in the placenta or separation of the placenta from the wall of the uterus • Activation of the maternal and fetal neuroendocrine system as a result of stress or other physiologic factors

Behrman & Butler, 2007

Copy from March of Dimes *Healthy Babies are Worth the Wait: Preventing Preterm Births through Community-Based Interventions: Implementation Manual*, 2011.
