

## Pregnancy Definitions

**Amniocentesis** – A test used to detect genetic characteristics, or determine lung growth, of the unborn baby by removing a small amount of amniotic fluid (see below).

**Amniotic fluid** – The liquid surrounding the baby. This is the “water” that “breaks” when you are ready to have your baby.

**Anesthesia** – Loss of sensation due to medication – an epidural provides partial loss of sensation; general anesthesia, where you would be asleep is complete loss of sensation

**Apgar score** – A rating that is given when the baby is born which reflects skin color, muscle tone, heart rate, breathing, and reflexes. 0-2 points are given for each category and the maximum score is 10.

**Areola** – The dark colored skin surrounding the nipple. When breastfeeding, the baby should have as much of the areola as possible.

**Breastfeeding** – Provides baby with immunities and is the most complete, perfect food for baby. It is recommended to breastfeed for at least six months if possible, but breastfeeding for as little as the first 72 hours of life will benefit your baby.

**Breech** – Referred to as a position of the baby in the pelvis or birth canal. A breech baby can be bottom, feet, shoulder or hand first. For a normal vaginal birth the baby’s head should be the first part seen.

**Cervical incompetence** – A condition that causes the cervix to open before the pregnancy is completed, and causes preterm deliveries the second and third trimesters. This is sometimes treated with a cerclage, a suture line reinforcing the cervix to temporarily keep it from opening.

**Cesarean** – A birth in which an incision is made through the abdomen and uterus to deliver the baby.

**Contraction** – The tightening of the uterine muscles. There are different types of contractions – Braxton-Hicks contractions and labor. Braxton-Hicks contractions, or practice contractions, prepare the uterus to gain strength for the work of labor. They are irregular, and do not cause the cervix to change. Labor contractions become longer, stronger and closer together with time. They cause the cervix to change.

**Cord** – A rope-like structure which connects the placenta to the baby. This is how nutrition, oxygen and waste products are moved back and forth through baby.

**Crowning** – The appearance of the top of the baby’s head during pushing.

**Dilation** – The opening of the cervix which happens during labor – measured in centimeters. During pregnancy the cervix is closed, and the hormones of labor soften the cervix and it begins to open, measured from one to 10 cm., which is the fullest dilation.

**Ectopic pregnancy** – A pregnancy that occurs in the fallopian tubes instead of the uterus.

**Effacement** – The gradual thinning of the cervix. Different from dilation, the cervix begins as a thick circular muscle. The thickness is influenced by the hormones of labor. As labor gets closer, the cervix begins to get thinner and shorten. It is measured in percentage, beginning at 0% prior to labor, to 100% being fully effaced.

**Electronic Fetal Monitoring (EFM)** – A machine which continuously records the baby's heartbeat and your contractions by two different disks placed on your abdomen. They are held in place by elastic belts.

**Epidural Anesthesia** – A choice of pain management popular in labor and delivery. A medication is given through a small tube placed in the epidural space (in your back). It causes numbness from above the belly button to about mid-thigh.

**Episiotomy** – A small incision made at the birth opening during pushing to enlarge the vaginal opening. This is usually done if there is a possibility of tearing as episiotomy incisions heal faster than a tear.

**Failure to progress** – A halt of labor progress either because the baby has not dropped into the birth canal or the cervix stops dilating. This results in a cesarean section and is not a predictable condition.

**Fetus** – Term used for the baby after eight weeks of pregnancy.

**Fontanelle** – the “soft spots” on the baby's head. At birth there is a soft spot on the top and back of the head. These areas allow the baby's head to mold during the birth process. The back one closes quickly, the top one takes about 18 months and allows rapid growth of the skull and brain.

**Fundus** – The top portion of the uterus. During pregnancy, your progress is measured by fundal height from the top of the fundus to the pubic bone. After pregnancy your nurse will check your fundus to be sure your uterus is clamping down appropriately to ensure you are not bleeding too much.

**Gestation** – The time the baby is growing in the uterus. A full term baby is considered 37 to 40 weeks gestation.

**Gestational diabetes** – A form of diabetes that can occur in pregnancy. This can result in a complicated pregnancy and will require the mother to be monitored closely.

**Kegal exercises** – Exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor. Consistent exercise will help control urine leakage and aid in healing after delivery.

**Labor** – predictable, rhythmic contractions leading to the opening of the cervix, descent of the baby, and delivery of the baby and placenta.

**Lactation** – production of breast milk. Some production can occur prior to delivery.

**Lightening** – Engagement or repositioning of the baby in the pelvis, also known as “dropping” – usually moms feel they can breathe better when this occurs, but there is more pressure on the bladder causing an increase in urination.

**Lochia** – The discharge of blood, mucus and tissue for approximately six weeks after delivery. The color will change from bright red to dark red to brown, to pink to creamy white. When the discharge has completely stopped, the cervix has closed.

**Membranes** – the amniotic sac, which contains the amniotic fluid and the baby. The membranes can rupture during labor, or can be ruptured for you during labor which can influence the strength and length of contractions.

**Miscarriage** – the spontaneous termination of a pregnancy at any time during the pregnancy.

**Mucus plug** – a protection to the uterus to prevent germs into the uterus. This plug can loosen and fall out up to four weeks prior to labor, or the day labor will begin. It is a sign you are getting ready for labor, but not a sign you need to go to the hospital.

**NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit)** – A special section of the hospital designed to take care of babies born with complications.

**Nicotine** – a chemical substance found in tobacco. It is found in the baby's blood as well as in the breast milk if mother smokes. When used during pregnancy, nicotine causes formation of a smaller cord and smaller baby; and can negatively influence brain development.

**Oxytocin** – The hormone that your body produces to begin labor. If you have extended labor or contractions that are not changing the cervix, your provider may prescribe Pitocin, the pharmacy synthetic form of oxytocin.

**Perineum** – the area between the vaginal opening and the rectum. Warm compresses applied to the perineum during labor can help the tissues relax and accommodate the stretching.

**Placenta previa** – the placenta forms partially or completely over the cervix instead of the uterine wall. This condition warrants a planned cesarean section.

**Preeclampsia** – Formerly called toxemia, this condition is marked by high blood pressure, swelling in the hands, feet and/or face and protein in the urine. This condition will only reverse with delivery.

**Quickening** – Mother's first perception of the baby's movement. This is usually around 20 weeks for first time moms.

**Resident** – A licensed physician participating in a medical training program.

**Retained placenta** – Failure of the placenta to completely separate from the uterine wall. Any retained placenta must be manually or operatively removed or excessive bleeding and infection can occur.

**Rh factor** - a protein in your blood that determines whether your blood is "positive" or "negative". This can influence the health of your baby if you are negative and your baby is positive, causing you to form antibodies against the baby which can lead to a miscarriage.

**Rh immunoglobulin** – If the protein in your blood has a different Rh factor than your baby, this treatment will prevent your immune system from making these harmful

antibodies. The treatment is usually administered twice, the first time at about 28 weeks and again at delivery.

**Ripening** – term referring to the maturing of the cervix to prepare for cervical dilation and effacement. If labor is going to be induced, the clinician may try to ripen the cervix with a medication.

**Ruptured membranes** – term referring to the breaking of the waters. This can result in a large gush or can just be dampening of the underwear. Regardless of the amount, ruptured membranes means a trip to the hospital for evaluation. It can be difficult to know if you are leaking amniotic fluid or if you had a release of a little bit of urine with the baby giving your bladder a kick.

**Stages of labor** – Defined in three stages: Stage I: beginning with labor to complete dilation. Stage II: dilation to the birth of the baby. Stage III: is the delivery of the placenta.

**Station** – the position of the fetus in the pelvis, defined by the position in regard to the ischial bones in the mothers pelvis. When the baby is above those bones, the baby is given a minus value (-3, -2, -1). When the baby's head is even with those bones, the baby is at zero station. Then as the baby descends through the birth canal, is given a plus value (+1, +2, +3; baby is +4 or +5 at delivery).

**Trendelenburg** – Bed position in which the persons head is lower than their hips and knees.

**Trimester** – Pregnancy is divided into three trimesters, each made up of about three months.

**Tubal pregnancy** (see Ectopic pregnancy).

**VBAC (Vaginal birth after cesarean)** – birth of a baby vaginally after a previous experience of having a cesarean section with another pregnancy. These decisions are made by your health care provider and are dependent on your health, baby's position, and the reasons for your cesarean section previously.

**Vitamin K** – a vitamin that aids in forming clotting factors in the blood. Babies get an injection of vitamin K at birth as standard procedure.