Maternity Services

Twins and multiple pregnancies

Information for patients, relatives and carers
Congratulations! The ultrasound scan has shown that you are expecting two or more babies. This can be a big shock. This booklet has been provided to help answer some of the questions you may have about your pregnancy care and what to expect.

How common are twins?
Twins are not very common and occur in about one in 50 births. Having more than two babies is even more uncommon. Many twin pregnancies are related to fertility treatments.

There are two types of twins:

**Identical twins**
These come from one egg fertilized by a sperm which later divides to become two babies. These may have one or two placentas (afterbirth). If they share a placenta they have a higher chance of problems developing. Check with the team which type you have.

**Non-identical twins**
These come from two eggs fertilized by two sperms; this is the more common type of twin pregnancy. It is more common if a woman is over 35 and having fertility treatment.

How will being pregnant with twins affect me?
For most women, these pregnancies are normal with a good outcome. However twin and multiple pregnancies can have more problems than a single baby pregnancy, some minor, some major.

You may have more sickness, heartburn, and constipation, and feel more tired. A good diet is important, and we would suggest taking an iron and vitamin pregnancy supplement. You should expect to put on more weight than with a single baby and feel more uncomfortable. Most women with twins will wish to start their maternity leave earlier, from about 30 weeks. You may find by that stage you will need plenty of daytime rests.

Your pregnancy care will be shared between your midwife and your consultant at the hospital. This is to make sure that any problems are detected early and treated as soon as possible. If you have more problems you will need more hospital visits.

What major problems can occur?
1. One or both babies being small
2. Early delivery and admission of the babies to the special care baby unit. Average delivery time is at 37 weeks. Major risks lie with delivery under 32 weeks (see below)
3. Raised blood pressure and pre-eclampsia (checked by your midwife)
4. Diabetes in pregnancy (checked with a sugar tolerance test)
5. Vaginal bleeding before labour
6. Increased risk of a caesarean section or an assisted delivery
7. Anaemia (low blood count)

Will my antenatal care be different?
You will have regular visits to the hospital and be seen by your midwife in the community.

Depending on the type of twins you are carrying, you may be asked to come in for regular scans every two to four weeks. We will look at your babies’ growth and the fluid around them. We will also do blood tests regularly to check your blood count. We will try to arrange your scans on the same day as the clinic.

You need to be aware of the risks of early labour. Although we have no way of reducing the risk, by seeing you early we can improve the outcome for your babies by giving you steroids which help your babies’ lungs work better.

If you have the type of twins who share a placenta you will be having scans every two weeks. These twins (monochorionic) have a small risk (10 to 15%) of one baby benefiting at the expense of the other (twin to twin transfusion).
We will ask you to see your community midwife between scans who will measure the height of the uterus to ensure there is not a sudden increase in the fluid around the babies.

If you experience any sudden increase in size or discomfort, please contact the central unit and come in for a check. This may mean excessive fluid around the baby, which is the sign of the problem developing.

Is there anything I need to watch out for at home?
You should come into the unit for a check if you are between 24 to 36 weeks and have:
- Loss of any fluid from the vagina
- Any bleeding
- Any contractions which are regular or increasing in strength.

Where and how will I give birth?
We recommend that you give birth in the obstetric unit, where the monitoring facilities and medical staff are available to deal with any problems. We also recommend continuous monitoring of your babies’ heart beats in labour, as it is unreliable to monitor them safely in any other way.

Your obstetrician will discuss the best method of birth with you. This may be a vaginal birth. However, with twins you are more likely to need a caesarean section or instrumental birth (for example, with forceps). It is best to discuss the pain relief and other requirements with your midwife and doctor and have a birth plan in your notes.

The decision about having vaginal birth or a caesarean section will depend on many factors, for example the number of babies, their size, the way they are lying and any issues arising in labour. Even when the first baby is delivered vaginally, there is still a risk of caesarean section for the second baby.

We recommend in the majority of cases that the births are carried out in the operating theatre, where there are facilities available to immediately deal with any emergencies.

If your babies are born early they may have to go to the neonatal unit. We will arrange for you to meet the neonatal team and to visit the unit if required.

What happens afterwards?
We encourage you to breastfeed the twins. Many mums manage it very successfully. Your midwives and breast feeding counsellors will give you advice and support. You can also meet other mums and there are twin groups in the area. Ask your midwife for details.

One baby can tire you, so plan ahead for two! Your partner, family and friends can all be useful in helping out later on.

Further information
If you have any questions or need further advice, please ask. Your midwife and obstetrician are there to help. You can also log on to www.tamba.org.uk for support and advice. This is a support group for patients having multiple births.
Contact numbers
Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital
01256 313351 (central contact number 24/7)

Royal Hampshire County Hospital, Winchester
01962 824744 (central contact number 24/7)

www.hampshirehospitals.nhs.uk

Copies of all maternity patient information leaflets are available on the Trust’s website at www.hampshirehospitals.nhs.uk/maternitypatientinfo