

Don't Rush It

Preparing For A Healthy Delivery

(NAPSA)—One of the best things prospective parents can do for their infants, doctors say, is to wait for them.

The Trend

Physicians and organizations such as the March of Dimes say they are concerned about the large number of elective deliveries (C-sections and inductions) that are being scheduled for nonmedical reasons prior to 39 weeks. This troubling trend can lead to serious health consequences for the baby and potential dangers for the mother, too. Additionally, early and elective deliveries add high costs to the health care system.

Unfortunately, knowledge of the risks associated with early elective C-sections and labor induction is not widespread. In fact, a recent survey by UnitedHealthcare of first-time mothers found that more than half believe it is safe to deliver their baby before 37 weeks, even if not required because of a medical complication, while 24 percent believe that full term is reached before 37 weeks. However, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that scheduled deliveries occur only after 39 weeks' gestation.

"It's a common misperception among expectant mothers that nine months equals 36 weeks, but Mother Nature's formula for healthy babies is actually a little longer than that at 40 weeks," said Tina Groat, M.D., national medical director of Women's Health for UnitedHealthcare.

Research Reveals Serious Risks

Medical research reveals that babies born between 34 and 36 weeks are more likely to die than full-term infants and, if they survive, are more likely to have



Babies do best when they're allowed to grow for 39 weeks before being born.

developmental delays than babies born full term.

A study published in The New England Journal of Medicine found that more than 35 percent of elective C-section deliveries were performed before 39 weeks' gestation. And, supporting ACOG's warning, the research revealed that babies born at 37 weeks were twice as likely to have health problems, usually respiratory in nature, than babies born at 39 weeks or later. Further, neonatal intensive care unit admissions were 5.9 percent at 39 weeks' gestation and rose to 8.1 percent at 38 weeks and 12.8 percent at 37 weeks.

"The results of this study underscore the importance of educating expectant mothers on the risks associated with elective deliveries prior to 39 weeks," said Groat. "Women should talk with their doctors about the best time to deliver in order to reduce complications for the newborn baby."

Tips for Expectant Parents

To help, UnitedHealthcare offers free information and tips on having a healthy pregnancy at www.healthy-pregnancy.com.