

Plain Language Glossary of Prenatal Terms

Healthy Start Community Health Worker Course



Developed by JSI for the Healthy Start EPIC Center



Abnormal/abnormality: Not normal or usual.

Anemia: A condition in which your blood cannot carry enough oxygen to the rest of your body. The most common cause is not having enough iron. During a prenatal visit, the healthcare provider will do a blood test to check a pregnant woman for anemia.

Breastfeeding: Feeding a baby milk from the mother's breasts. Also known as "nursing" or "lactation".

Birth defect: A physical or biochemical abnormality that is present at birth and may be caused by genetics or environmental influences.

Birth outcomes: The results or outcomes of pregnancy. Good birth outcomes include full-term, healthy, normal birthweight babies. Poor birth outcomes include preterm birth, low birthweight babies, birth defects and infant mortality.

BMI: Stands for "body mass index". BMI is a measure of body fat based on weight in relation to height. A healthy BMI is between 18.5 and 24.9

Cervix: The opening to the uterus, located deep inside the vagina. When a woman gives birth to a baby, the cervix opens (dilates) to let the baby out. (*See uterus, vagina*).

Cesarean Section: A Cesarean section (C-section) is surgery to deliver a baby. The baby is taken out through the mother's abdomen. Some C-sections are planned, but many are done when unexpected problems happen during delivery.

Complications of pregnancy: Health problems which occur during pregnancy and may involve the mother's health, the baby's health or both. Complications can arise during pregnancy, or as a result of health problems prior to conception.

Conception: The joining of an egg and a sperm to start a pregnancy. Also called "fertilization".

Congenital: Something that you are born with.

Contractions: Periodic tightening and relaxing of the uterine muscle to help push the baby down the birth canal during childbirth. During a contraction a woman may feel cramping, pressure, and pain in the pelvic area and abdomen. Contractions that become stronger at regular and increasingly shorter intervals indicate that a woman is in labor. (See *labor*).

Contraception/contraceptive: Methods for preventing pregnancy. Also called “birth control”.

Depression/perinatal depression/postpartum depression: Depression is a mood disorder which causes persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest in daily activities and things you used to enjoy. Perinatal depression is depression during or after pregnancy, while postpartum depression is experienced following childbirth up to a year after the baby is born.

Diabetes: A disease in which your blood glucose (blood sugar) levels are too high. Glucose comes from the foods you eat. Insulin is a hormone that helps the glucose get into your cells to give them energy. With type 1 diabetes, your body does not make insulin. With type 2 diabetes, the more common type, your body does not use insulin well. Another type of diabetes, known as gestational diabetes, can occur for the first and sometimes only time during pregnancy. Women with diabetes may have more difficult pregnancies with a higher risk of complications. (See *gestational diabetes*).

Dilation: The opening of the cervix during childbirth.

Down Syndrome: Down syndrome is a condition in which a person is born with an extra copy of chromosome 21. People with Down syndrome can have physical problems, as well as intellectual disabilities. Down syndrome cannot be cured, but early treatment programs can help improve skills and quality of life.

Domestic violence: See *Intimate partner violence*.

Doula: A trained and experienced companion to women from the later stages of pregnancy through labor and delivery of the baby. A doula's sole purpose is to provide physical, emotional, and informational support to women during labor and birth (without doing anything medical).

Embryo: Unborn, developing baby, up to the third month of pregnancy.

Family history: A record of family history includes information about diseases in your close family members such as parents, grandparents, siblings and children, to see whether you might be at risk for genetic (inherited) diseases or other health conditions based on patterns in your family.

Family planning: Making decisions and plans about whether and when to have children, and using birth control to help you carry out your plans.

Father involvement/partner involvement: Father involvement both before and after the child is born is very important to the health and development of both mother and child. Having an involved father during pregnancy has been shown to have a positive impact on birth outcomes.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD): FASD is a term describing the range of effects that can occur in a child whose mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy. These effects can include physical, mental, behavioral and learning disabilities and problems that last for life.

Fetal growth restriction: Condition in which a baby in the uterus does not grow to normal weight during pregnancy. It may be caused by poor nutrition, alcohol or drug use during pregnancy, infections or other health problems in the mother.

Fetus: Unborn, developing baby, from the third month of pregnancy to birth.

Folic acid: Vitamin that helps the body make healthy new cells. It is very important for women to get the recommended 400 microgram dose every day, both before and during pregnancy, to help prevent birth defects of the baby's brain and spinal cord.

Full-term: Pregnancy usually lasts about 40 weeks. A full-term pregnancy is a pregnancy that lasts between 39 weeks, 0 days and 40 weeks 6 days. Babies born full term have the best chance of being healthy, compared with babies born earlier or later.

Gestational diabetes: Diabetes that starts during pregnancy in some women, due to the effect of pregnancy hormones. Women with diabetes may have more difficult pregnancies with a higher risk of complications.

Glucose tolerance test: Blood testing to measure an individual's response to drinking a sugary drink in order to check for gestational diabetes.

Health care provider: A professional who provides preventive, curative, or rehabilitative health care services. Can be anyone who provides health care services including physicians, dentists, nurses, social workers, therapists, etc.

Health insurance: Type of insurance coverage (including private insurance and government-funded healthcare such as Medicaid) that pays for health care and medical expenses. Insurance coverage can vary in how much a person pays for it each month, what health services are covered, and other out-of-pocket costs.

High-risk: More likely to develop or have a disease or health problem.

HIV: HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV weakens a person's ability to fight infections and cancer. HIV can be passed to another person through sex or through sharing needles for drug use. Mothers can also pass it to their babies at birth or through breastfeeding, although taking anti-HIV

medication greatly reduces this risk. A person may have HIV without knowing it until they get HIV testing.

Hypertension: High blood pressure.

Immunizations: Shots (vaccinations) given to protect people against serious diseases, such as measles, tetanus and flu. There are recommended immunization schedules for babies, children, teens, pregnant women and other adults. An important reason for well-woman and well-child visits is to receive recommended immunizations.

Infant mortality: The death of a child under the age of 1 year.

Interconception: The time between the end of one pregnancy and the beginning of the next one.

Interconception Care: Similar to preconception care, but provided to women (and men) between pregnancies. (See *preconception care*).

Intervene/intervention: Intervene means getting involved to prevent something from happening, or solve a problem. A medical treatment or preventive measure.

Intimate Partner Violence: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is physical, sexual or psychological harm caused by a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Also called “domestic violence”.

Labor: The process of giving birth to a baby. Signs of going into labor include contractions, leaking fluid or blood from the vagina, low backache, and abdominal cramping. (See *contractions, vagina*).

Last menstrual period: The date of the first day of a woman’s last period before becoming pregnant. This date is used to calculate the woman’s due date and the number of weeks of pregnancy.

Low birthweight: Term used to describe a baby born weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces. Babies with low birthweight may be at increased risk for health problems or developmental delays.

Maternal mortality: The death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days after termination of a pregnancy, from any cause related to or caused by the pregnancy or its management, and not by accidental causes.

Medical home: Having a usual source of medical care, a regular healthcare provider or clinic that a woman and her children go to. A “patient-centered medical home” is a team-based approach to health care delivery which provides comprehensive and patient-centered medical care to patients, to keep people as healthy as possible.

Medications: Medicines used to treat diseases or relieve pain. Some medications are prescription medications (ordered by a healthcare provider), while others are “over-the-counter”, meaning you can get them at the pharmacy without a prescription.

Miscarriage: A pregnancy that unexpectedly ends before the embryo or fetus is old enough to live outside the mother, too early to result in the birth of a live baby. Also known as “spontaneous abortion”.

Mood altering substances: Substances including alcohol, marijuana and other drugs which affect your mind and change the way you think or feel.

Neonatal abstinence syndrome: A group of problems which occur in a newborn who was exposed to addictive opiate drugs in the mother’s womb before birth.

Neonatal withdrawal: Babies whose mothers use addictive drugs during pregnancy can become dependent on the drug, and as a result may experience withdrawal symptoms after birth.

Neural tube defects: Birth defects of the brain, spine, or spinal cord. These defects occur during the first month of pregnancy. The most common forms are spina bifida and anencephaly. There is no cure for neural tube defects and often nerve damage is permanent, but treatments can prevent further damage.

NICU: A neonatal intensive-care unit (NICU) is an intensive-care unit for the care of premature babies or newborns who are ill. Also known as “intensive care nursery”.

Nurse practitioner: An advanced practice nurse who is able to prescribe medications. Nurse practitioners often specialize by patient population—pediatric nurse practitioners specialize in treating children, and women’s health nurse practitioners specialize in women’s health.

Nurse-midwife: A nurse who has received advanced training to provide health care for pregnant women and to deliver babies. Nurse midwives also provide postpartum care.

Nutrition: Taking in food and using it for growth, energy and repair. Good nutrition, including eating lots of fruits and vegetables and maintaining a healthy weight, is important for a healthy pregnancy.

Obesity: Condition of being overweight, diagnosed when a person’s BMI is greater than 30. (See *BMI*).

Pediatrician: A doctor who specializes in the care of babies, children and adolescents up to age 21.

Perinatal: Period of time before and after childbirth, particularly the five months before and one month after birth.

Placenta: The placenta is an organ that develops in the uterus during pregnancy. It provides oxygen and nutrients to the growing baby and removes waste products from the baby's blood.

Planned pregnancy: Intended pregnancy.

Postpartum: The period of time after childbirth, from birth until about 6 weeks after the baby is born.

Preconception: Before a woman becomes pregnant.

Preconception care: Medical care and preventive activities for women and men that focus on the parts of health that have been shown to increase the chance of having a healthy baby. Preconception

care aims to improve people's health before pregnancy by promoting good nutrition and exercise, addressing alcohol, tobacco and drug use, and treating chronic diseases.

Preeclampsia: A condition when a pregnant woman develops high blood pressure after the 20th week of pregnancy. It can lead to serious health problems for the mother and the baby, so it is important for a woman's blood pressure to be checked regularly at prenatal visits during pregnancy.

Pregnancy: When a woman is expecting a baby.

Pregnancy History: A questionnaire to find out the history of a woman's experience with pregnancy, such as how many times she has been pregnant, the outcomes of those pregnancies, and health problems she has had during past pregnancies. This information helps health care providers to provide the best care for a woman during future pregnancies.

Pregnancy spacing: The practice of waiting between pregnancies, also known as "birth spacing". It is important for a woman's body to rest between pregnancies to maintain the best health for her and her children. The current recommendation is to wait at least 18 months between pregnancies.

Prenatal: Before birth.

Prenatal Care/Visit: Health care received during pregnancy to make sure both the mother and developing baby are healthy, and that the baby is developing normally. The recommended schedule of prenatal visits for a normal pregnancy is: weeks 4 to 28: 1 prenatal visit a month, weeks 28 to 36: 1 prenatal visit every 2 weeks, and weeks 36 to 40: 1 prenatal visit every week.

Prenatal vitamins: Vitamin and mineral supplements that are intended to be taken before and during pregnancy to help cover any nutritional gaps in a mother's diet. Prenatal vitamins include folic acid. (See *folic acid*).

Preterm labor: When a woman starts going into labor too early in pregnancy, before 37 weeks.

Preterm birth: Birth that occurs before the 37th week of pregnancy. A normal pregnancy lasts around 40 weeks. Preterm babies—babies born too early—can have serious health problems and may need additional care, medications or surgery. Also known as “premature birth” or “prematurity”.

Prevent/prevention: To stop a disease or injury from happening. Preventive care is given to help keep people well.

Referral: Sending someone (setting up an appointment) to a doctor or other health care provider, or to another service such as substance abuse treatment, mental health services, or social services.

Reproductive Life Plan: A woman’s individual and personal plan of whether, when, and how to have children. It includes personal goals and states how to achieve them.

Risk factor: Something that increases the risk or likelihood of developing a disease or health condition.

Screening: Testing to detect those with a high probability of having or developing a disease or condition. Testing to look for early signs of illness, before you have any symptoms. The word “screening” can also refer to asking questions about a person’s health status, history, living conditions and behavior to find out about health risks a person may have.

Sickle Cell Anemia: Genetic disease that affects red blood cells, causing them to change shape and block small blood vessels, limiting blood flow and causing pain and anemia (not enough oxygen in your blood).

Smoking Cessation: To quit smoking cigarettes.

Spontaneous abortion: Unexpected loss of a pregnancy before the 20th week. Also called a “miscarriage”.

STI/STD: STI stands for “sexually transmitted infections”. STIs are also called STDs which stands for “sexually transmitted disease”. STIs/STDs are diseases passed to people through sex. Using a condom helps to prevent STIs/STDs.

Stillbirth: Loss of a pregnancy after the 20th week of pregnancy.

Substance abuse: Overuse or dependence on an addictive substance, such as alcohol or drugs.

Support system: The people in your life who care about you and give you support and help when you need it. Your support system may include family members, friends, your partner or spouse, and others.

Swaddling: A method of wrapping a newborn baby, especially babies who are premature or sick, which provides comfort and a calming effect on the baby.

Teratogen/Teratogenic: Something that can causes birth defects in a developing fetus.

Ultrasound: A scan that allows doctors to see inside a patient’s body. An ultrasound during pregnancy uses soundwaves to create a picture of the inside of the woman’s uterus and of the developing baby.

Unplanned pregnancy: A pregnancy that is mistimed, unplanned or unwanted at time of conception.

Uterus: A muscular organ shaped like an upside down pear in which the developing fetus grows during a pregnancy. Also called the “womb”.

Vagina: A muscular tube going from the uterus to the outside of the body. Also called the “birth canal”. A baby goes from the uterus through the vagina when it is born.

Well woman visit: A healthcare visit for women to review their overall and reproductive health and receive preventive services such as contraception and immunizations. Well-woman visits are

recommended annually and often include breast and pelvic examinations and a pap smear.