

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

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

Behrman & Butler, 2007

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

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