



## PATIENT FACT SHEET

# Fertility Drugs and the Risk of Multiple Births

Infertility treatments make it more likely that you will become pregnant with twins, triplets, or more. This is called multiple gestation. You might think it would be nice to have many babies at once, but this may not be good for their health and your health.

### ***How likely is multiple gestation?***

Very possible. Depending on the type of fertility treatment used, if more than one follicle is produced, the risk of multiple gestation can occur in more than 1 out of 3 women successfully getting pregnant.

### ***What could happen to the babies?***

The babies could be born too early, which is called premature birth. Half of all twins and 90% of all triplets are born prematurely. These babies may have many health problems as seen in babies born early without the help of fertility treatments. Their lungs might not be strong enough, so they might have trouble breathing. The blood vessels in their brains might bleed easily. The babies will probably be underweight and may get sick or even die.

Before birth, the babies might not get all the nutrition that is carried by the blood from their mother. This is particularly true if they share a placenta, the tissue that carries nutrients from the mother to the baby. They may not grow as fast as normal. If the multiple babies share important blood vessels through a common placenta, they may develop heart problems or die.

Twins, triplets, and other multiples are more likely to have problems with their brain development and nerves if they are born early. One of the more common problems is cerebral palsy, an abnormality of the brain. Other problems associated with multiple births may not present for many years after delivery.

### ***What could happen to mom?***

If you are pregnant with more than one baby, you may experience problems during the pregnancy. You may get high blood pressure or diabetes. You may not get enough iron. You may have too much amniotic fluid, which is the liquid that surrounds the baby during a pregnancy. Too much amniotic fluid is not good because it can cause premature labor.

You may need to stay in bed or even stay in the hospital for weeks before delivery. This is especially likely if you go into labor early.

You may have problems delivering your babies. You will be more likely to need a C-section, which is when the babies are delivered through a surgical opening in your belly.

### ***What can I do to ensure that I reduce the risk of multiple births?***

During a fertility treatment cycle when fertility drugs are used with timed intercourse or insemination, your doctor will monitor your cycle very carefully. The use of fertility medications will make your body produce more eggs than usual. This makes it more likely that enough eggs will be produced so that one or more eggs will be fertilized. However, if it appears that too many eggs are developing, your doctor may cancel your cycle and tell you not to have an insemination or intercourse to eliminate your risk of multiple births.

In vitro fertilization (IVF) means that your egg and your partner's sperm are joined (fertilized) in the laboratory. Then the doctor places the fertilized eggs (embryos) into your womb. It is less likely that you will become pregnant with triplets or more if only one or two embryos are placed in your womb. Before the placement of these embryos (embryo transfer), you and your doctor will decide how many embryos to place in your womb.

If three or more embryos implant inside your uterus, your doctor may suggest that you undergo a procedure called multifetal reduction. Multifetal reduction allows you and your doctor to reduce the number of implantations to one or two. Usually the procedure is done early in the pregnancy to increase the chance of a healthy and successful pregnancy. Choosing to do this procedure is difficult. Couples who are thinking about this option should talk to a counselor.