

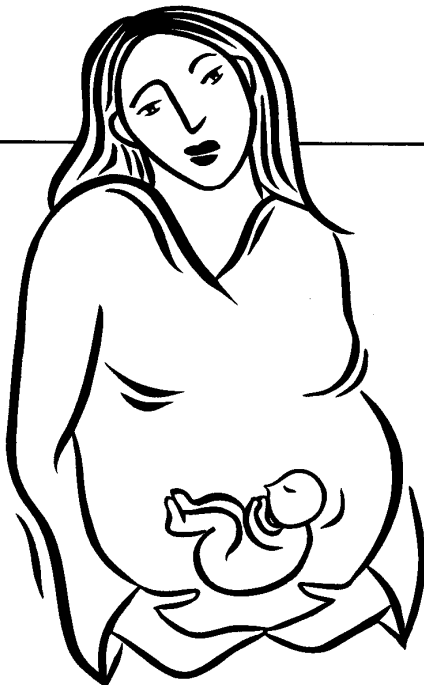


Birth Defects and Genetic Disorders

Is Your Baby at Risk?

Birth defects are abnormal conditions ranging from mild to severe that can occur in the womb as a result of inherited factors, environmental factors—such as substance abuse, infections, radiation or prescription drugs—or a combination of the two. Scientists still don't know why most birth defects occur. Fortunately, there are ways to help correct and prevent some birth defects. Very often, damage to the womb caused by smoking, drinking and exposure to infection can be prevented. If you have a family history of any of the birth defects listed, it's important that you talk to your doctor about your baby's risk.

Birth Defect	Description
malformations detectable at birth	congenital heart malfunction; spina bifida (open spine); cleft palate, clubfoot and other physical abnormalities; missing, malformed or duplicated body parts
metabolic defects	disease of body chemistry such as phenylketonuria (PKU), cystic fibrosis, dangerously high cholesterol that causes heart attack
blood disorders	sickle-cell anemia, thalassemia, hemophilia
chromosomal abnormalities	Down syndrome, Klinefelter's syndrome, Turner's syndrome, etc. Most involve some combination of retardation and physical malformations.
perinatal damage	low-weight babies due to infections or complications in the pregnancy, drugs or chemical agents; breathing, heart or digestion problems; long-term physical and mental impairments (These birth defects are the most preventable by avoiding substances such as alcohol, tobacco and recreational drugs.)



Genetic Counseling

Gene analysis and other tests can be done to gather data for diagnosis and treatment of genetic disorders. You may need genetic counseling if:

- you're concerned that you may have an inherited disorder or birth defect.
- you're over 30 and planning to be pregnant.
- you have a child with a genetic disorder or birth defect.
- you've had two or more miscarriages or had a baby who died in infancy.
- you've been exposed to radiation, chemicals, infections or drugs.
- you would like more information about genetic defects that occur more often in your ethnic group.
- you and your partner are first cousins or other blood relatives.
- based on ultrasounds or blood tests, you've been told that your pregnancy may be at risk for complications or birth defects.