

# Experiencing a Potential Early Birth

## When Is a Baby Considered “Preterm” or “Extremely Preterm?”

A normal pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks. Babies born before 37 weeks of pregnancy are called “**preterm**” or “premature.” Babies born before 28 weeks of pregnancy are considered extremely preterm.

## What Are the Health Outcomes for Extremely Preterm Babies?

Medical advances have helped some preterm babies live and overcome health challenges. However, the chances that a baby born extremely early will continue to live without disability are still very small. Babies born before 23 weeks of pregnancy typically do not survive even with resuscitation. Although survival rates increase for babies born between 23 weeks and 25 weeks of pregnancy, very often survivors face serious, often lifelong disabilities. As gestational age increases, the outlook for preterm babies improves.

## What Will Happen If My Baby Is Expected to Be Born Extremely Preterm?

You and your healthcare team will work together to form a plan about the care you and your baby will receive. This involves weighing the risks and benefits of the available treatment options for both you and your baby. Your personal beliefs, values and what your wishes are for your baby also are important in forming the care plan. It is important to remember that this care plan may change as circumstances change. For instance, care plans may be adjusted after your baby is born when more information is known about your baby’s condition. Care decisions also may change depending on how your baby responds to treatment.

## If My Baby Is Born Extremely Preterm, Will They Need Resuscitation?

Extremely preterm infants will require **resuscitation**. Often this means helping the baby breathe by inserting a tube into their airway. Steps may be taken to start the baby’s heart. Even with resuscitation efforts, some babies will not live. Those who do may have severe disabilities. In some cases, after discussion with the healthcare team, a family may decide that resuscitation is not the best option for their baby. In situations like this, medical care will focus on keeping the baby warm, comfortable and free from pain.

## Who Can I Turn to for Support?

Your healthcare team is trained to give medical guidance and to include you and your family’s wishes and preferences in the decision-making process. Because your culture, values, and religious beliefs are important to consider when making these decisions, you also may want to seek support from family, trusted friends, and clergy. You may wish to ask to see a Social Worker during your stay at the hospital to offer more support for you and your family.