

Building on Research

Certain pre-pregnancy characteristics of women, such as history of previous preterm delivery and low BMI, are associated with preterm delivery.¹¹⁻¹³ Experiences during pregnancy may also increase a woman's risk for preterm delivery. For example, stress has been thought to increase a woman's risk for preterm delivery; however, epidemiologic investigations have shown inconsistent results.¹⁴ More research on stress and its biological mechanisms during pregnancy may help improve our understanding of the effects of stress on pregnancy and possible interventions that would promote stress reduction.

More research is needed to help us understand the racial disparities associated with preterm delivery. African Americans have higher rates of preterm birth than any other racial or ethnic group,¹¹ and preterm delivery is the *leading* cause of death for African American infants.¹⁰

Genetics may play a part in preterm birth, as evidenced by the increased risk for mothers with previous preterm infants and among sisters and children in the same family.⁵ Other possible factors that may increase the risk of preterm delivery include Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) and inflammatory responses; however, more research is needed to examine these relationships.¹⁰

Future research on the early identification of women at high risk and the evaluation of interventions are needed to help discover the complexities of preterm birth and how it can be prevented.

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