

Baby's Almost Here: Managing Risks as You Approach Delivery

Katrina and Chris Sarvis have a toddler, Luca and baby number two, a daughter, on board.

"I think having Luca, who's almost two years old, actually keeps my stress level down. He's a good distraction and he kind of keeps my energy level up. He keeps me going and moving."

Staying active is important for a healthy pregnancy and baby. Going full-term, close to or at 40 weeks, is a goal encouraged by health professionals including the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses.

"They want to make sure that providers, and not just providers, but women know that is what is going to be safest for your baby. Waiting until your body goes into labor naturally on its own as much as possible."

As Katrina knows, prenatal care is key to having a healthy, full-term pregnancy.

"Your blood pressure is perfect, your urinalysis is great, your weight gain has been completely appropriate for a pregnancy. So, just keep up the good work."

"I always talk to them about maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and those are some simple things including not smoking or using any illicit drugs or alcohol. Eating healthy is also going to be very important as well. And taking a prenatal vitamin. And then most importantly is following up with your prenatal visits on time and throughout your pregnancy to ensure that we're monitoring the pregnancy for any problems that could occur."

Dr. Kathleen Khan, herself a new mom, has conducted research on the benefits of full-term births. The findings show that deliveries before 39 to 40 weeks can cause complications.

"We know that babies are still growing, even at 37 weeks, when they're term. They still need their brain to develop more and their lungs to develop more in particular. So, these babies are at a much higher risk if born in that early term period of having respiratory issues and potentially needing to be admitted to the neonatal ICU."

Another cautionary note, using medications to bring on or induce labor doesn't always work. And there are other downsides.

"And you're going to put them at risk for a C-section and that just puts more risk to the Mom for an infection."

Being born too soon can have far-reaching consequences for children, including developmental delays, academic difficulties in school, and an increased risk of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

As a lactation specialist, Julie Duncan sees firsthand the difference having a full-term baby can make.

"It's far better to let nature take its course and have labor begin on its own."

Katrina Sarvis takes that advice to heart. Enjoying time with her family and letting her husband, Chris, take up some of the slack help reduce her stress, which can also contribute to a healthy pregnancy.

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"Every week that passes is a major milestone not just for me as a mom. The longer I can go, it's only the better for the baby. So, with this pregnancy, I only hope to go into labor when my body and my baby feel ready to come out."

"I do encourage women to try to enjoy it as much as possible. And try to enjoy what you're doing for this baby and giving the baby the most optimal chances of having a healthy delivery and life."