

any infection is treated quickly (urine infections are more common during pregnancy).

#### Labour and birth

Twins are generally regarded as full term at 37 weeks, with birth recommended around 37 weeks (40 weeks is full term for single babies). If you develop pregnancy problems or the babies are not growing well, the twins may need to be born earlier than this.

If the “leading” (lower) twin is coming head-first and both babies are healthy, the best option, usually, is for labour and a vaginal birth.

There is a greater chance you will need an “induction” if you are carrying twins because some complications that occur may mean delivery prior to natural labour is recommended. This is where you come into hospital and labour is started by various methods, before natural labour occurs.

Continuously monitoring the baby’s heart beats is an important way to measure their health and stress levels during labour. This may restrict other laboring options for mothers having multiples compared to those available to mothers birthing single babies. There will also be more medical staff involved as there are specialist carers provided for each baby e.g. two pediatricians. Discuss this in more detail with your LMC.

If the leading twin is not head-first or one/both twins are unwell, it may be necessary to have the twins by Caesarean section (an operation). Caesareans are used to reduce potential complications to the babies and mother’s health. Ask your LMC for further information about this.

#### After the birth

For more information on preparing for life at home read the Multiples NZ booklet “The First Year, Positively Thriving with Twins”. This booklet is available through your local multiple birth club or via Multiples NZ.

#### Getting support

There are numerous “Multiple Birth” clubs organized by other mothers with twins (or triplets/quads) and these clubs have regular newsletters, social media based support groups, get-togethers for play; and retailer discounts, they also offer support and advice for new mothers. Many have equipment that can be hired at very reasonable rates. If there is no club in your area you can access similar benefits through Multiples NZ. You can find out about your local club via the Multiples NZ website.

#### Resources:

Multiples NZ (previously known as NZ Multiple Birth Association)(online support via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn)

Multiple Birth in New Zealand – all aspects.

[www.multiples.org.nz](http://www.multiples.org.nz)

Breast Feeding Multiples [www.lalecheleague.co.nz](http://www.lalecheleague.co.nz)

Multiple Birth Home Help Payment

[www.workandincome.govt.nz](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz)

Parenting and Child Birth Education [www.kiwiparent.co.nz](http://www.kiwiparent.co.nz)

Parenting [www.familyservices.govt.nz](http://www.familyservices.govt.nz)

Maternity Information (not Multiples specific)

[www.maternity.org.nz](http://www.maternity.org.nz)

**For more information please contact your local  
NZMFMN Unit**

**Auckland: 09 307 4949 Ext 24951**

**Wellington: 04 806 0774**

**Christchurch: 03 364 4557**

**New Zealand Maternal Fetal Medicine Network**

[NZMFMN@adhb.govt.nz](mailto:NZMFMN@adhb.govt.nz)

## TWINS

**(Non-Identical/Fraternal/Dizygotic)**



New Zealand  
Maternal  
Fetal  
Medicine  
Network

Congratulations, you're having twins!

### What kind of twins?

Twins occur approximately once in every 50-60 pregnancies in New Zealand. There are two main "types" of twins:

- 75% will be **fraternal or non-identical or dizygotic**. These twins result from the mother producing two eggs which are fertilized by two separate sperm. These twins may both be boys, or girls, or one of each! They are siblings who are sharing their mother's uterus (womb), as they grow. They generally have separate placentas and separate sacs. These twins can run in families.



- The other 25% of twins will be **"identical" or monozygotic twins**. These twins result from one egg and one sperm that would usually make one baby deciding to split into two very early on. (Approximately 1 in 200 pregnancies will be identical twins). This is a random event and not usually inherited in families. These identical twins are also defined into different types depending on when the split happens.

### Diet and supplements

All women should take extra care to eat healthily when they are planning a pregnancy and once pregnant. This does not mean "eating for two", but ensuring you are eating:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Minimizing takeaways and high fat/high sugar/salt foods

Multiple pregnancies are particularly demanding because there is more than one baby.

- All women are encouraged to take Folic Acid prior to pregnancy and up to at least 12 weeks. Women carrying multiples need extra Folic Acid, usually 5mg per day.

Neurokare is an iodine supplement also recommended in pregnancy to help babies brains develop normally, (except for women with an overactive thyroid).

Low iron levels are common in women and during pregnancy you may need to take extra iron both for yourself and to help the babies development.

Your Lead Maternity Carer (LMC) will be able to advise you.

### Care during pregnancy

All twin pregnancies will have some input from an Obstetrician (Specialist). However, most will progress normally with just a little extra care/monitoring. It is particularly important to have regular antenatal visits with your midwife or doctor as all twin pregnancies have an increased risk of the following problems:

- Severe 'morning' sickness (hyperemesis)
- Preterm (early) labour
- High blood pressure
- Pre-eclampsia (toxaemia) – a pregnancy problem that can involve having protein in the urine, high blood pressure, babies not growing well and oedema (swelling/puffiness)
- Diabetes in Pregnancy
- Growth problems (one or both babies not growing as expected)

Your LMC (Lead Maternity Carer) will talk to you about these issues and let you know the signs and symptoms to watch for.

**Remember, if anything occurs that seems abnormal or concerns you, please contact your LMC, GP, or the hospital.**

### Screening

Most twins will be born healthy, but having twins means there is an increased risk that one (or possibly both) babies may have an abnormality or medical problem. This risk is greater if they are identical.

There are screening tests available, (First or Second Trimester screening) that can help to discover whether your twins are more likely to have problems. These tests are also available for single pregnancies.

Women are encouraged to have screening done as it can give more information about the babies and help in planning the best pregnancy care.

- First trimester screening is done between 12 and 14 weeks and involves a scan and blood test
- Second Trimester Screening involves a blood test done between 14 and 20 weeks

### Scans

Because it is more difficult to check how the babies are growing when you are having multiples, you will need extra scans:

- Every 4 weeks from 20 weeks gestation (more frequently if there are concerns). These scans detect if one or both twins are not growing as well as they should

### Premature labour

The most common complication that arises with any multiple pregnancy is going into labour early (i.e. before 37 weeks). This is because your uterus (womb) is stretching earlier with two babies.

All women are asked to watch for signs of labour. These include:

- Regular painful period like cramps which do not improve with a change of position
- Low back pain which comes and goes
- Change in vaginal discharge (A 'bloody' show)
- Fluid leaking from the vagina
- A feeling of pelvic pressure

Because urine infections can trigger preterm labour, it is important your LMC checks for this regularly and