Key Statistics on Multiple Births

WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD OF HAVING TWINS OR MORE?

In the UK about one in every 63 pregnancies results in a multiple birth. There has been an upward trend in the numbers over the last 20 years. The rise is attributed to the use of fertility treatments as well as the increased survival rates of premature babies and women starting their families later.

The incidence of multiple births in the UK?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All maternities</td>
<td>695,233</td>
<td>56,725</td>
<td>24,394</td>
<td>776,352</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twins</td>
<td>10,839</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>12,049</td>
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<tr>
<td>Triplets</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>163</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quads or more</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>All multiples</td>
<td>10,989</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>12,214</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple birth rate per 1000 maternities</td>
<td>16.0 (increase from 15.6 in 2013)</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>15.7</td>
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*Please note these figures include live and still births. For figures excluding still births, please contact Tamba press department.

Identical or non-identical?

Whether the babies are identical or non-identical depends how the babies are formed.

Identical twins occur in about one-third of multiple pregnancies. Known as monozygotic twins, a single egg is fertilised then splits into two (or, very rarely, three or more) creating identical babies with the same genes, physical features and sex. They may or may not share a placenta. Characteristics such as size and personality depend on non-genetic factors, so may be different.

Triplets and higher order multiples are formed this way too but may be in different combinations.

Non-identical twins are created when a women produces two eggs at the same time and both are fertilised, each by a different sperm. The fertilised egg is called a zygote, and these non-identical twins are known as dizygotic or fraternal twins, because they grew from two separate zygotes. The babies are no more alike than any other brothers or sisters, and may be both male, either female, or one of each.

NICE Guidelines for multiple pregnancies

NICE published guidelines in 2011 to set national standards aimed at achieving optimal outcomes in multiple pregnancies by avoiding higher than...
necessary rates of assisted birth and caesarean, and ensuring the mother receives appropriate neonatal risk assessment before birth.

These include:
- A core team of named specialist obstetricians, specialist midwives and ultrasonographers with experience and knowledge of dealing with multiple pregnancies
- An appropriate care plan for each women
- Gestational age and chorionicity (i.e. whether the babies share a placenta or have one each) should be established when crown-rump length measures from 45mm to 84 mm (at approximately 11 weeks 0 days and 13 weeks 6 days). This is the best time to determine if the babies do share a placenta and it is also useful for determining the risk of Down’s syndrome.
- Monitoring for intrauterine growth restriction from 20 weeks, with scans less than 28 days apart
- Consistent criteria for referral to subspecialist services
- Guidelines for determining the timing of birth in uncomplicated twin and triplet pregnancies

In September 2013 NICE also published Quality Standards for Multiple Preganacies. Quality standards are developed independently by NICE, in collaboration with healthcare professionals and public health and social care practitioners, their partners and service users. NICE quality standards are a concise set of prioritised statements designed to drive measurable quality improvements within a particular area of health or care.

What effect has IVF had on multiple pregnancies?
On average 16.3% of In Vitro Fertilisation pregnancies result in either twins or triplets compared with 1% who conceive naturally. Approximately 13,500 babies are born each year as a result of IVF, therefore this has had a significant impact on the amount of multiple births.

What guidelines and policies are in place for fertility treatment?
In 2009 the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HEFA) launched the elective single embryo transfer policy allowing clinics to develop their own strategy with the aim of reducing the UK IVF rate (proportion of multiples born as a result of IVF) to 10% in stages over a period of years. NICE guidelines published in February 2013 also recommend single embryo transfer in many cases.

What are the risks associated with multiple births?
The infant mortality rate is around five times higher for multiple births than for singleton births. This is partly due to multiple births tending to have lower birth weights than singletons.

Multiple pregnancies are also associated with a higher risk of stillbirth, neonatal death (death under 28 days) and child disability (source: ONS, 2013).

What is Twin to Twin Transfer Syndrome (TTTS)?
Twin to Twin Transfer Syndrome occurs in about 10-15% of identical twins that share a placenta. TTTS twins share some of the same circulation, resulting in the transfusion of blood from one twin (the donor) to the other (the recipient) in the womb. In most cases the donor twin may become smaller and anaemic due to not having enough blood supply.

The recipient twin. The excess fluid in the recipient twin (polyhydramnios) can be quite uncomfortable for the pregnant mother and pressure on the cervix can lead to ruptured membranes and early delivery.

The implications of this are very serious for the survival and health of both twins and they will require close monitoring in pregnancy.

For more information....
Tamba is the national charity dedicated to improving the lives and well-being of families with twins, triplets or more. Representing nearly 17,000 multiple birth families and 175 local clubs in the UK, Tamba provides help and support to both parents and professionals to meet the unique challenges that multiple birth families face.

- For further information, please visit www.tamba.org.uk
- For confidential and emotional support for families with multiples, please call Twinline which is staffed by trained volunteers that are parents of multiples and can offer support on sleeping feeding, crying, behaviour, discipline, school issues or special needs. It is free to call from a landline and is open everyday from 10am–1pm and from 7pm–10pm on 0800 138 0509


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