

Babies born earlier may risk setbacks

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More mothers are giving birth a few weeks shy of a full pregnancy, which could lead to health and developmental complications, a report says.

The Washington Post said so many babies are born before full term that the average pregnancy in the United States has shortened from 40 to 39 weeks.

The reasons for women giving birth earlier vary from medical to societal trends. More women are waiting until their thirties to have children, which puts them at more of a risk for needing labor intervention. Also, the availability of fertility treatments and medical advancements enable mothers to slow or speed up delivery, often in an effort to coordinate the birth so loved ones can be there, the Post said.

Although some obstetricians see earlier deliveries as a positive change -- a reduction in stillbirths and labor complications -- many doctors fear that this trend may lead to long-term developmental and behavioral setbacks.

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