

Many stillbirths can be prevented, researcher claims

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(Medical Xpress)—A leading reproductive researcher has called for increased awareness around stillbirth, saying many could be prevented.

Speaking on International Pregnancy and Infant Loss and Remembrance Day, the University of Adelaide's Professor Sarah Robertson says there is a common misconception that any baby who dies in the mother's uterus was never meant to live.

"The unbearable sadness of losing a child is impossible to put into words," says Professor Robertson, Director of the University's Robinson Institute. "The tragedy is even greater given that many lost babies did not have to die."

In Australia, despite having lower rates of [stillbirth](#) than poorer countries, seven out of every 1,000 pregnancies end in stillbirth.

"Only about one in five of these is caused by genetic abnormality or malformation," says Professor Robertson. "In high income countries like Australia half of all stillbirths occur at more than 28 weeks of [pregnancy](#). If they were delivered in time, nearly all of these would have survived with good [neonatal intensive care](#)."

Professor Robertson says we need to increase awareness of stillbirth and promote discussion of the topic in the media, by policy makers and in our local community.

"If we ignore or are fatalistic about stillbirth, this will virtually guarantee that no progress is made," she says.

"There are many things that expecting mums and their doctors can do. We need to ensure that optimal maternal health is maintained; detecting and managing slow fetal growth and diabetes in pregnancy is crucial. Regular checking of fetal movements can make a big difference."

Professor Robertson says pregnancies should not be allowed to continue more than 10 days beyond 40 weeks, when placental function diminishes.

Research into the factors that ensure a healthy pregnancy will also help prevent stillbirth.

"In the Robinson Institute, we are studying how care from conception can protect a woman and her baby," she says. "Scientists and medical doctors are working together to define the lifestyle factors and choices which build a strong placenta to better nurture the growing fetus. By investing in this early time, all children can be given the best chance at life."

Provided by University of Adelaide

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