

Study correlates neonatal and early childhood outcomes with preterm birth

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In a study to be presented on Feb. 6 at the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine's annual meeting, The Pregnancy Meeting, in New Orleans, researchers will report on a correlation between initial neonatal and early childhood outcomes among children delivered less than 34 weeks gestation.

Preterm [babies](#) are at high risk for death and other serious medical complications, and some premature infants continue to experience side effects from prematurity even during later childhood. It's uncertain whether [preterm babies](#) diagnosed with intestinal problems, severe respiratory problems, bleeding in their brains, and other complications during their stay in the newborn [intensive care unit](#) (NICU) after birth will continue to have complications when examined later in childhood.

This study examined more than 1,700 babies who were born prematurely at less than 34 weeks gestation. It then followed babies after they were discharged from the NICU and re-evaluated them as 2-year-olds for evidence of cerebral palsy and neurologic impairment.

Results revealed that about one in five babies who appeared healthy at the time of hospital discharge had cerebral palsy or neurologic impairment at 2 years of age. Further, one in three babies who had one or more serious complications during their NICU stay also had these complications.

"Babies delivered preterm are at high risk for complications as newborns

and also later in childhood," said Tracy Manuck, M.D., one of the researchers and co-director of the University of Utah Prematurity Prevention Clinic. "We found that babies who had serious complications in the newborn intensive care unit were more likely to have [cerebral palsy](#) or neurologic impairment in early childhood, but not necessarily. The converse is also true, as about one in five babies who appeared healthy at the time of hospital discharge had complications in early childhood. Early childhood evaluation and interventions should not be withheld from seemingly healthy previous preterm children."

However, Manuck noted that the relationship between serious NICU complications and serious neurologic impairment in [early childhood](#) was not perfect, as the NICU [complications](#) were only moderately predictive of prognosis later in childhood.

Provided by Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

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