

Study suggests link between late-term births and better academic outcomes

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Even at term, gestational age may have an impact on children's academic performance, findings of a new study suggest. The research showed an association between gestational age at term and above-average rankings

in a number of academic subjects.

The study, published in *Pediatrics*, compared teacher-reported outcomes for 1,405 9-year-old children in the United States, analyzing performance in mathematics, science and social studies, and language and literacy, for those born at 37 through 41 weeks gestation. It found that longer gestational age was significantly associated with average or above-average rankings in all areas. It also suggested a general pattern of worse outcomes for children born at early term (37-38 weeks) and better outcomes for those born at late term (41 weeks), compared with those born at term (39-40 weeks). An intriguing finding was that late-term birth was significantly associated with improved mathematics outcomes.

The findings highlight the importance of gestational age, even among term infants, noted Nancy E. Reichman, professor of pediatrics at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School's Child Health Institute of New Jersey, and one of the study authors.

"We hope that these findings will stimulate future research and data collection on the topic, in order to build a more substantial evidence base. More and better data are needed, particularly in the United States, that can allow researchers to link gestational age to educational outcomes throughout the full range of gestational age and to control for relevant potentially confounding factors," Reichman said.

Reichman's team plans to further investigate associations between gestational age at term and children's and young adults' cognitive and behavioral outcomes at different ages, she said.

Moreover, although the study did not specifically link findings to obstetric interventions/induced labor, Reichman said that "the findings should be factored in if and when deciding to intervene before labor naturally occurs." However, she added, "Since there have been relatively

few studies of links between gestational age at term and children's educational outcomes, particularly in the United States, it would be premature to change the national recommendation for delaying elective deliveries to 39 weeks at this point."

More information: Amanda Hedges et al, Gestational Age at Term and Educational Outcomes at Age Nine, *Pediatrics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2020-021287](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-021287)

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