

MANAGING YOUR BREECH BIRTH

What Is Breech Birth?

Breech birth, or breech presentation, means that the baby is in an abnormal position for birth. The normal position is head down. In abnormal positions, the buttocks or feet enter the birth canal so that they would be delivered first. The three types of breech presentations are frank, complete, and footling. In frank breech, the most common type (in 48% to 73% of births), the buttocks would come out first. The legs are straight up, with hips bent and feet near the head. In a complete breech (4.6% to 11.5% of births), the hips and knees are bent, with feet near the buttocks. In a footling (incomplete) breech (12% to 38% of births), legs are stretched out and the feet would come out first during delivery.

What Causes Breech Birth?

Causes include abnormal placentas, problems with the uterus, and masses in the pelvic area. These problems include fibroids, odd uterine shapes, and too much or too little amniotic fluid. Breech birth is more common when there are problems with the baby (such as Down syndrome), two or more babies, and prematurity.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Breech Birth?

There are generally no symptoms, however, if the baby is in a breech position, the health care provider may be able to hear heart beats of the baby above the belly button (umbilicus).

How Is a Breech Birth Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis from the medical history and physical examination. The health care provider's hands placed on the mother's lower abdomen (belly) can locate the baby's head, back, and buttocks. Ultrasonography will be used to confirm the diagnosis.

How Is a Breech Birth Treated?

Health care providers can sometimes turn babies into the head-down position before labor starts. The procedure to do this is called external cephalic version. Usually, cesarean delivery is safest for breech babies. Cesarean section is needed for foot-ling presentations or for a baby whose head is too far back (hyperextended). It's also needed when labor isn't progressing normally, a baby's status isn't stable, the baby's weight is very low or high, or the mother's pelvis isn't big enough.

Vaginal delivery for breech birth can be dangerous. Only obstetricians who have training in vaginal breech deliveries should do these deliveries. Other requirements for vaginal deliveries to be attempted include normal birth weight, frank breech position, normal head position, normal progress of labor, continuous fetal monitoring, and informed consent. An immediate cesarean section must be possible if needed.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing a Breech Birth

- ✓ **DO** remember that the mortality rate for breech babies is increased 13 times. There may be more congenital anomalies, low oxygen levels, birth injury, and prematurity.
- ✓ **DO** talk to your health care provider about exercises to do at home that may help turn the baby to the head-first position.
- ⊗ **DON'T** miss appointments with your obstetrician.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: Tel: (202) 638-5577; Website:
<http://www.acog.org>

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