

# Fetal Growth Restriction



## What Is Fetal Growth Restriction?

Fetal growth restriction (FGR) refers to a fetus (unborn baby) that is smaller than expected. It is sometimes called intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR). FGR occurs in about one of every 10 pregnancies.

## What Causes FGR?

Several factors may lead to FGR, such as:

- Normal variation — Most fetuses with FGR are healthy, just smaller than average
- Placenta or umbilical cord problems — Not enough blood flow or nutrients to the fetus
- Illness in the mother — High blood pressure, lupus, vascular diseases, preeclampsia
- Issues in the fetus — Birth defects, genetic problems, some infections
- Smoking or vaping — Ask for help to quit
- Alcohol or some medications
- Poor nutrition — Rarely a cause of FGR

## How Is FGR Managed?

Your health care provider may recommend certain tests once or twice a week, including:

- Amniotic fluid volume via ultrasound
- Doppler ultrasound to check blood flow in the umbilical cord or other blood vessels
- Biophysical profile (BPP) to evaluate the baby's movements and fluid
- Nonstress test (NST) to monitor the fetal heart rate

Additional actions may be taken depending on individual circumstances, such as:

- An ultrasound in two to three weeks to check fetal growth.
- Checking fetal chromosome count by taking a sample of amniotic fluid (amniocentesis).
- Steroid medicine to help the fetus mature if preterm delivery is planned.
- Admission to the hospital if needed for more frequent monitoring.
- Preterm delivery may be recommended in some circumstances.

## What Can You Do?

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Avoid smoking, vaping, alcohol, marijuana, illicit drugs.
- Pay attention to fetal movements.
- Maintain your normal schedule of exercise and healthy activity. The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine does not recommend routine activity restriction for FGR.
- Call your health care provider if the fetus doesn't seem to be moving as much as usual.

## How Does FGR Affect Your Baby's Future Health?

- Most babies catch up in their growth after birth and go on to have normal lives.
- There may be an increased risk of certain problems after your child becomes an adult (heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke and diabetes).
- This is an active area of research. Ask your pediatrician if your child needs any special testing or follow-up care.

## How Does FGR Affect Your Future Health?

- FGR may mean an increased risk of metabolic syndrome, a cluster of conditions that occur together, such as:
  - High blood pressure
  - Heart disease
  - Stroke
  - Type 2 diabetes
  - Excess body fat around the waist
  - Abnormal cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- Tell your primary doctor that you had a baby with fetal growth restriction and ask whether you should have annual testing for metabolic syndrome.
- You can reduce your risk by:
  - Breastfeeding for one to two years, if possible (breastfeeding lowers your risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease)
  - Avoiding tobacco, vaping products, alcohol and recreational drugs
  - Staying active and exercising five days a week
  - Eating a healthy diet
  - Aiming for a healthy body weight

## Can You Decrease the Chances of Having Another Baby with FGR?

- The chance for FGR in future pregnancy is about 25% (one out of every four pregnancies).
- The chance may be higher if you have certain illnesses (e.g., lupus or high blood pressure).

## Before Your Next Pregnancy

- Quit using tobacco, vaping products, alcohol, marijuana and illicit drugs.
- Discuss with your doctor if you have any chronic health conditions (high blood pressure, diabetes, lupus or other autoimmune disorders).
- Review with your doctor all medicines you take (both prescription and over-the-counter).
- Take a prenatal vitamin daily containing folic acid (800 mcg) before you get pregnant.
- Eat a healthy diet, exercise and aim for a healthy body weight.

## During Your Next Pregnancy

- Attend regular prenatal visits to check on blood pressure and fetal growth.
- Ask your doctor whether extra ultrasounds are recommended to check fetal growth.
- Ask your doctor whether you should take low-dose aspirin.

## Additional Resources:

Cedars Sinai  
[cedars-sinai.org/health-library/diseases-and-conditions/f/fetal-growth-restriction-fgr.html](https://cedars-sinai.org/health-library/diseases-and-conditions/f/fetal-growth-restriction-fgr.html)

UTSouthwestern Medical Center  
[utswmed.org/medblog/newborn-fetal-growth-restriction-what-to-expect](https://utswmed.org/medblog/newborn-fetal-growth-restriction-what-to-expect)

