

When Is My Baby Due?



What is a due date?

Your due date is the date in the middle of about 20 days during which your baby is most likely to be born. The average pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks. Most women go into labor on their own within 10 days of their due date, up to 10 days before their due date or up to 10 days after their due date. Very few babies are born on their due date. Your due date is just an estimate or good guess. There is no way to know exactly what day your baby will be born.

Why do I need a due date?

The due date tells you when your pregnancy is full term or complete. Being born too early (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) or too late (after 42 weeks of pregnancy) can mean more risk for your baby's health. This makes it important for your health care provider to keep track of when your baby is due. Your due date also helps your provider watch your baby's growth and order testing that can check the health of your baby at specific times during your pregnancy. You can use your due date to know what to expect throughout your pregnancy and to be ready when your baby is born.

How can I calculate my due date?

There are many tools you can use to figure out your due date. You can use online due date calculators, smartphone apps, or counting ahead on a calendar. The next page of this handout lists ways to figure out your due date.

How does my provider decide my due date?

The first due date that your provider tells you is usually based on your last menstrual period and the size of your uterus (womb) at your first visit. The time of conception (when the sperm meets the egg) is usually 2 weeks after your last normal period. Most babies are born about 40 weeks after your last menstrual period. This means time from conception until your due date is about 38 weeks. Most babies grow at the same rate early in pregnancy so the size of your uterus at your first visit can help your provider estimate your due date.

Could my due date change?

The actual date the sperm and egg join is almost never known for sure. Your provider will likely recommend that you have an ultrasound once or twice in the first half of your pregnancy to make sure your due date is correct. The ultrasound can measure the size of your baby and use that information to figure out your due date. Your provider will likely recommend you have an ultrasound during your first trimester if you are not sure of the day your last period started, you had spotting or an abnormal period, you have irregular periods, or your provider's findings on your exam do not match the due date based on your last menstrual period. The due date based on a first trimester ultrasound is usually the most accurate (best guess). The ultrasound due date will be used if there is more than a week or so difference between the due date based on the ultrasound and the due date based on your period.

If you are not sure about your due date being changed, you can ask your provider the following questions to help you learn what due date is the best for you:

- What information about my due date is the best?
- What information is causing my due date to change?
- How will this change affect my care, now or later?



What if my baby doesn't come on my due date?

Your due date is just an estimate. It is normal for your baby to be born a little earlier or later than your due date. If your baby is born before 38 weeks of pregnancy, she or he may need some additional care. If you do not go into labor on your own by 41 weeks of pregnancy, your provider may discuss your options for having your labor induced and/or do additional testing to make sure your baby is healthy.

Ways to Calculate Your Due Date			
	How does it work?	How accurate is it?	What else should I know?
Date of Last Menstrual Period	Using the first day of your last menstrual period, count backward 3 months then forward 1 week.	Accurate within 2 weeks for women who have regular periods about every 28 days and whose last period was normal.	This is not the most accurate method for some women. If you are not sure of the day your last period started, had spotting or an abnormal period, or have irregular periods, an ultrasound may be more accurate.
Date of Conception	Using the date of conception, add 266 days.	Accurate within 1 week or less only if exact day you became pregnant is known, like with infertility treatments.	The exact date of conception is rarely known. Conception may not happen right when you have sex. Sperm can live in the uterus for up to 5 days. Using a known date of sex is not very accurate.
Ultrasound	Ultrasound is used to measure the size of your baby and predict your due date.	Accurate within 1 week or less if done in the first trimester of pregnancy. Accurate within 2 weeks in the second trimester. Accurate within 3 weeks in the third trimester.	Your baby can be measured as early as 5 to 6 weeks after your last menstrual period. Ultrasound is most useful for figuring out your due date when it is done in the first trimester. Later ultrasound is less accurate because babies grow at different rates.
Physical Exam	Findings such as the size of your uterus, presence of a heartbeat, or you feeling your baby's movement help your provider know how many weeks pregnant you are.	Not very accurate.	These findings differ a bit for each woman and can lead to an incorrect due date. These methods may help support a due date, but are not good to decide when the due date should be.

For More Information

March of Dimes

Calculate your due date with a due date calculator.

<http://www.marchofdimes.com/pregnancy/calculating-your-due-date.aspx>

Kids Health

Information on due dates, trimesters, and what changes you can expect for you and your baby.

http://kidshealth.org/parent/pregnancy_calendar/pregnancy_calendar_intro.html

National Institutes of Health

What to expect when you pass your due date.

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000515.htm>

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