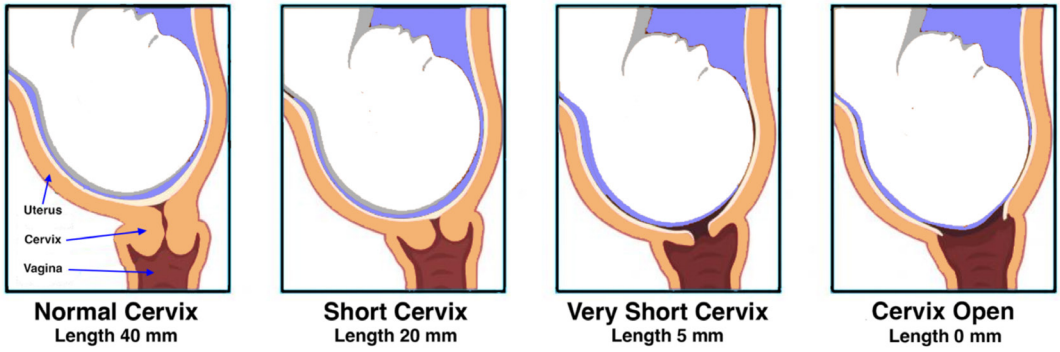
Understanding Short Cervix, Preterm Birth and Progesterone

What Is the Cervix?

The cervix is the passageway between the uterus (womb) and the vagina. When the cervix stays closed, it prevents the baby from being born. Usually, the cervix stays long and closed until the due date is near. The length of a normal cervix is 25 to 40 millimeters (about 1 to 2 inches). The cervix opens during childbirth (labor), allowing the baby to be born.

What Is a Short Cervix?

A cervix is considered short if it measures less than 25 mm (1 inch). If the cervix is short in the middle part of pregnancy, it might open and result in preterm birth. A short cervix does not always cause preterm birth, but it increases the odds. The good news is there are ways to reduce the odds of preterm birth.



What Is Preterm Birth?

A birth is considered preterm if it is more than three weeks before the due date. Preterm babies may have many types of health problems. Preterm birth can happen for many reasons, and cervical shortening is one of them.

Can Preterm Birth Be Prevented If I Have a Short Cervix?

Two treatments reduce the odds of preterm birth in women with a short cervix in the middle of pregnancy: progesterone and cerclage.

What Is Progesterone?

Progesterone is a natural hormone made by the placenta during pregnancy. With a short cervix, extra progesterone reduces the chance of preterm birth by half, but it does not eliminate the risk entirely. Progesterone is prescribed as a capsule or a gel and inserted into the vagina each night. The most common side effect is a scant amount of oily discharge. Vaginal progesterone is considered safe for pregnancy and has no known adverse effects on the baby. Some forms of progesterone contain **peanut oil**. If you have a peanut allergy, you should use a form that does not contain peanut oil.

What Is Cerclage?

Cerclage is a stitch (suture) placed around the cervix to help it stay closed. The stitch placement is a minor surgery performed in a hospital operating room. If the cervix is very short or the patient has had a prior preterm birth, cerclage reduces the risk of preterm birth by about half. It does not eliminate the risk of preterm birth.

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Which Is Better – Progesterone or Cerclage?

Both treatments have pros and cons. Both may reduce the risk of preterm birth, but neither is 100% effective. Your doctor will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the two treatments.

Factors that may affect the choice include:

- Shortness of the cervix
- How far along the pregnancy is
- History of prior preterm birth
- After this discussion, you and your doctor will decide which approach is better for you.

Is There Anything Else I Can Do to Lower the Risk of Preterm Birth?

- Regular check-ups: Keep all your appointments for regular prenatal visits and ultrasounds.
- Stay healthy: Eat well and get enough rest. Do not smoke, vape or take non-prescription drugs.
- Minimize stress: Use relaxation techniques and social support. Seek professional support if needed.
- Manage chronic conditions: Work with your doctor to manage diabetes, blood pressure, etc.
- Exercise: If you have a regular exercise program, it may be okay to continue exercising even if the cervix is short or if you have a cerclage. Discuss with your doctor whether you should modify your activity level.
- Ask questions: Don't hesitate to ask your doctor if you have questions or concerns.
- Be sure to report any symptoms such as cramping, pain, fever, bleeding and unusual discharge.

Additional Resources:

pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/short-cervix-in-pregnancy

cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/short-cervix

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