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

UTSouthwestern Medical Center
utswmed.org/medblog/newborn-fetal-growth-restriction-what-to-expect

pediatrix & obstetrix

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