

# Give Your Baby a Healthy Start

## How Progesterone Can Help You Prevent an Early Delivery

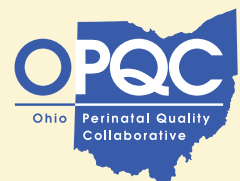


A medicine called progesterone can help some women reduce the chance that they will have their babies before 37 weeks of pregnancy, which is too soon.

### IS THIS YOU?

- Pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant
- Had a baby early before
- Had a miscarriage after 16 weeks of pregnancy, or
- Have a short cervix

If so, ask your doctor about progesterone treatment and how it can help you and your baby.





## What is Preterm Birth?

Preterm birth is when a baby is born too soon, before 37 weeks of pregnancy (or more than three weeks early).

Preterm birth is the leading cause of serious health problems and death for newborn babies in Ohio.

## What is Progesterone Treatment?

Progesterone is a hormone (or a natural substance) that is made by women's bodies, more so during pregnancy. It is sometimes called the pregnancy hormone. Some pregnant women need more progesterone than their bodies make. Doctors can give these women extra progesterone to help them carry their babies to full term (40 weeks).

Progesterone can help women who are more likely to have a preterm birth to deliver their babies closer to 40 weeks.

### PROGESTERONE TREATMENT OPTIONS

Progesterone comes in different forms:

- Shot
- Vaginal Capsule
- Vaginal Suppository
- Vaginal Gel

## Stories from Moms



"AFTER MULTIPLE MISCARRIAGES, I had given up on trying having another baby. But then a friend spoke to me about progesterone and referred me to the doctor that had helped her have a baby. Because of the progesterone therapy and treatment I received, I now have my daughter. I wish I would've known about progesterone and the options out there from the beginning." - *Angela of Junction City, Ohio*



"THE DOCTOR TOLD ME progesterone could help sustain my pregnancy. I wanted to do whatever worked. My main concern was to assure my baby would be able to survive if she came early. If I didn't have progesterone, she probably would not have made it." - *Patrece of Columbus, Ohio*



"I LOST MY FIRST TWO CHILDREN to preterm labor at 24 weeks. I didn't know what was wrong with me. Several years later, we decided to try again. Our doctor believed I had a short cervix and that, by getting progesterone, it could help me make it through a regular term pregnancy and have a healthy baby. I realized this was a way to save my baby and my doctor explained that there were no health risks associated with progesterone. At 38 weeks, I was able to deliver a healthy baby. It was my miracle. I now have two children, and without progesterone I never would have had a child." - *Jieney of Westerville, Ohio*



# Common Questions and Answers about Progesterone

## 1 HOW IS PROGESTERONE GIVEN?

Progesterone can be given as a shot once a week or as a vaginal suppository, capsule, or gel. Treatment can begin as early as 16 weeks into pregnancy and continue until your 36th week.

Shots may be given at your doctor's office or in your home. If you choose suppositories, capsules, or gel, you can place them in your vagina yourself every night before bedtime.

For women with a short cervix (which is the opening to your uterus, where your baby grows inside you), vaginal capsules, suppositories, or gel are thought to work best. You can place these inside your vagina and they deliver progesterone directly to your cervix.

Your doctor can perform an ultrasound test to find out if you have a short cervix (see #5).

## 2 IS IT SAFE?

Yes. This medicine is safe for you and your baby. Remember, your body already has progesterone in it, and the medicine gives you more at a time when you need it most.

## 3 ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS?

Progesterone does not have any harmful effects on babies. For mothers, side effects are rare, but may include redness, soreness, or itching at the site where the shot is given. The suppositories may cause vaginal dryness. Sometimes, headaches may occur with both.

## 4 HOW WELL DOES IT WORK?

Treatment does not mean you will have a full-term pregnancy. But if you've had a preterm birth before, progesterone can decrease your chances of having another one by as much as 35 percent. No other treatment works better.



## 5 HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A SHORT CERVIX?

The best way to know the length of a pregnant woman's cervix is to do a transvaginal ultrasound at 18-to-24 weeks of pregnancy. A transvaginal ultrasound allows doctors to see inside your body, including your unborn baby and your cervix. If your cervix is less than 20 millimeters long about halfway through pregnancy, you have a short cervix.

## 6 WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT WHEN TAKING PROGESTERONE?

Taking progesterone is the best way for women who are more likely to have a preterm birth to help their babies grow to full term. But it is not a medicine that you take only once. It must be taken regularly over time. For the medicine to work best, women need a shot once a week or to use suppositories, capsules, or gel every night.

## 7 HOW DO I PAY FOR IT?

More and more health insurance companies are paying for this treatment, and Ohio's Medicaid program does as well. If you are worried about paying for progesterone, talk to your doctor. And if you do not have insurance, ask your doctor's office about options that may be available.

# Knowing the Facts Can Help Your Baby

## YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO DELIVER EARLY IF YOU:

- Had a preterm birth before
- Have had a miscarriage
- Have a short cervix
- Are African American/Black
- Are pregnant with more than one baby
- Have had infections during your pregnancy
- Are very overweight or underweight
- Smoke, have too much stress or a poor diet
- Have gum disease or certain other health problems

## TO DECREASE YOUR CHANCES OF A PRETERM BIRTH:

- Stop smoking
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Visit your doctor at the start and then regularly while pregnant
- Know your risk for preterm birth
- Understand the warning signs of preterm labor
- Talk to your doctor about progesterone if you have a short cervix, have miscarried between 16-36 weeks, or have had a preterm birth.

## WARNING SIGNS OF PRETERM LABOR:

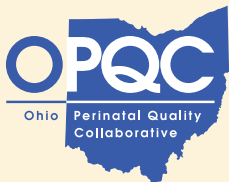
Preterm labor can begin suddenly and without warning, and the cause is not known. Contact your doctor immediately if any of these things happen:

- Thin watery discharge
- Pressure between your legs or low in your belly
- Low, dull backache
- Cramping like your period is going to start
- Feeling like something is not right
- Leaking fluid or bleeding from your vagina
- Sharp pains, contractions, tightening or balling up of your abdomen

## Resources

### FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PRETERM BIRTH AND PROGESTERONE:

- **Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative:** <https://www.opqc.net/>
- **March of Dimes:** <http://www.marchofdimes.com/>



The Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative includes hundreds of clinicians, 105 hospitals and clinics, the Ohio Department of Health, the March of Dimes and other stakeholders around the state dedicated to improving perinatal health in Ohio. To that end, OPQC members use scientifically proven methods to reduce preterm births in Ohio, which sees more infants die each year than most other states.

The Progesterone Project is funded by the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Department of Medicaid

