

Common questions and answers about progesterone



Progesterone can help women who are more likely to have a premature birth deliver their babies closer to full term or 40 weeks.

Q What is progesterone?

A Progesterone is a natural hormone made by women's bodies that increases during pregnancy. Progesterone treatments can help reduce the chance of premature delivery for women who do not produce enough of the hormone.

Q Why do I need to take progesterone?

A Progesterone can help women who are more likely to have a premature birth to deliver their babies closer to 40 weeks. You are at higher risk of premature birth if you have had another child early, miscarried after 16 weeks of pregnancy or have a short cervix, the opening to your uterus.

Q How do I know if I have a short cervix?

A The best way to know the length of a pregnant woman's cervix is to have a transvaginal ultrasound at 18 to 24 weeks of pregnancy. A transvaginal ultrasound allows your doctor, midwife or nurse 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 and are at higher risk for premature delivery.

Q How do I take progesterone?

A 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 and continues until 37 weeks of pregnancy.

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, 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.

Q Is progesterone safe?

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

Q Are there side effects?

A Progesterone does not have any harmful effects on babies. For mothers, side effects are rare, but may include redness, soreness, itching or bruising at the site where the shot is given. The suppositories may cause vaginal dryness. Headaches, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea can sometimes occur with either treatment. If these side effects worsen contact your doctor, midwife or nurse immediately.

Q How well does it work?

A If you've had a premature birth before, progesterone can decrease your chances of having another one by as much as 35 percent. No other treatment works better. For the medicine to work best, women need a shot once a week or must use the suppositories, capsules or gel every night as directed.

Q How do I pay for it?

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



OBBO is a partner in CelebrateOne, a community-wide initiative to reduce infant mortality and help more babies celebrate their first birthdays. For more information and resources, visit www.celebrateone.info and www.ohiobetterbirthoutcomes.org.

Information provided courtesy of the Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative.