



Question: What is a due date?

Answer: A due date is an estimation of when you are likely to give birth. The estimated due date (EDD) is traditionally 40 weeks and 0 days after the first day of the last menstrual period. Here is a breakdown of how providers describe the length of a pregnancy¹:

- *Early term* babies are born between 37 weeks 0 days and 38 weeks 6 days.
- *Full term* babies are born between 39 weeks 0 days and 40 weeks 6 days.
- *Late term* babies are born between 41 weeks 0 days and 41 weeks 6 days.
- *Post term* babies are born at 42 weeks and 0 days or later.

Question: How can you figure out your due date?

Answer: Most doctors, midwives, and online due date calculators use *Naegele's rule* to calculate the EDD. Naegele's rule assumes that you had a 28-day menstrual cycle, and that you ovulated exactly on the 14th day. To calculate your EDD, you add 7 days to the first day of your last period and then count forward 9 months (or count backwards 3 months).² This is equal to counting forward 280 days or 40 weeks from the first day of your last period.

In cases where the date of conception is known precisely, such as with IVF pregnancies, the EDD is calculated by adding 266 days to the date of conception (or subtracting 7 days and adding 9 months).

Question: How accurate are due dates?

Answer: Naegele's rule was first developed in the late 1700s, before we had other ways to estimate gestational age. We now know that many people have longer or shorter cycles, irregular ovulation, or may not be able to recall the first day of their last menstrual period. Researchers have found that ultrasound measurements taken during early pregnancy are more accurate than Naegele's rule at determining gestational age.^{3, 4, 5}

Question: What are the chances of going into labor on your own by your due date?

Answer: Without an induction, it is common to still be pregnant on your EDD. For example, a study of 1,514

pregnant women found that among those giving birth for the first time, 50% gave birth by 40 weeks and 5 days and 75% gave birth by 41 weeks and 2 days.⁶ For women who had given birth previously, the estimates changed to 50% giving birth by 40 weeks 3 days and 75% by 41 weeks. In another study that followed women from pre-conception to birth, only 25% gave birth by 39 weeks and 5 days.⁵

Question: What are the risks of going past your 'due date'?

Answer: Pregnancy length can vary for many reasons. Having a 'longer' pregnancy can run in families and is more common in first pregnancies. However, research shows that the risk of certain health problems can begin to increase after 40 weeks. These can include higher risks of infection, placental abruption, postpartum hemorrhage, Cesarean for non-reassuring fetal heart rate, forceps or vacuum assisted birth, severe perineal tear, moderate or thick meconium (stool) in the amniotic fluid, NICU admission, being large at birth, and low 5-minute Apgar scores. Most concerning, the risk of stillbirth begins to rise substantially at 41 weeks.^{7, 8, 9}

Certain health factors (such as older maternal age, being pregnant for the first time, having a higher body mass index, and being exposed to racism) can also increase stillbirth risk. To learn more, visit ebbirth.com/duedates.

Question: What's the bottom line?

Answer: Based on the best evidence, there is no such thing as an exact "due date," and the EDD of 40 weeks is inaccurate. Instead, it's more appropriate to say that there is a normal range of time in which most people give birth.

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“An estimated due date can be helpful, but it's not an exact prediction.”

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