

“My doctor refuses to schedule my c-section before 39 weeks. If 38 weeks is full term, why would she do this? I want the best for my baby, but I also think I’m going to go crazy if I’m pregnant much longer. Should I get a second opinion?”

Although 37 weeks is considered term, the standard of care for elective delivery is at least 39 weeks.

Babies born between 37-38 weeks (early term deliveries) have a higher risk of medical problems compared to those who are full term (39-40 weeks). Early term babies are 2-3 times more likely to be admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit. They are also more likely to have feeding problems because they cannot coordinate sucking, swallowing, and breathing. They are more at risk for transient tachypnea, apnea, and death. These babies also face long-term consequences of learning and behavioral problems in childhood.

These issues are related to the critical brain and organ growth that occurs between 35 and 39 weeks. At 35 weeks, a baby’s brain weighs only two-thirds of what it will weigh at 39-40 weeks. This additional growth and maturation of the brain is important for normal breathing, eating, and motor function.

Elective early delivery is very different from early deliveries that are medically necessary due to indications such as hypertension, diabetes, or fetal growth problems.

In 2011, Lee Memorial Health Systems took part in the March of Dimes initiative to eliminate elective deliveries less than 39 weeks. The initiative involved five states: Florida, California, Illinois, New York, and Texas. These states account for forty percent of deliveries nationally. Five to six hospitals from each of these states applied and were chosen to participate in the project.

Nearly forty percent of early term deliveries were elective at LMHS. That number has been reduced to less than five percent with the March of Dimes initiative. The combined national data for the project is due to be released in the near future.

For additional information, please see the March of Dimes website at www.MarchofDimes.com
“Healthy Babies Are Worth the Wait”