



Women's *health*

by Contemporary OB/GYN of Western Kentucky

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Advanced Testing for Preterm Labor & Birth Risk

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Fetal Fibronectin (fFN) Test

Preterm birth is classified as any birth that occurs prior to 37 weeks. Full term birth is between 37 and 40 weeks. According to the March of Dimes, roughly 12 percent of births in the United States are preterm.

Fetal fibronectin is an advanced test that analyzes preterm labor and birth risk. It checks for the presence of a protein in the vagina. This protein is found in the beginning of the first trimester and continues to be present throughout the second half of the second trimester (around 22 weeks). This protein works as a glue that binds the fetal sac to the uterine lining. The presence of fFN after 22 weeks may suggest that the glue is disintegrating, preparing

the body for labor. This is why testing for the presence of this protein is a good indicator of whether or not a woman needs further evaluation for preterm birth.

The fFN test is completed with a quick and easy collection. A cotton swab is inserted into the vagina to collect endo-cervical vagina secretions. The collection is very similar to that of a routine pap smear. After collection, the secretions are sent to a laboratory for analysis and results are returned to the physician within 24 hours. The outcome is either a positive or negative result and is viable for two weeks.

Patients Who Qualify for (fFN) Testing

There are two instances when fFN testing is suggested. First, women who are showing

no signs of preterm labor, but are at heightened risk for preterm birth (asymptomatic patients). This includes:

- Women who have had a previous preterm birth
- Women pregnant with twins, triplets, or more
- Women with certain uterine or cervical abnormalities

Secondly, women who are experiencing symptoms of preterm labor (symptomatic patients) may be given an fFN test. Preterm labor symptoms include:

- Contractions every ten minutes
- Change in vaginal discharge (leaking fluid or bleeding)
- Pelvic pressure
- Low, dull backache
- Cramps that feel like a period

- Abdominal cramps with or without diarrhea

Benefits to Patient

There are many benefits to fFN testing such as the elimination of unnecessary evaluation and pregnancy restrictions such as bed rest for those with a negative result. Physicians are also provided with a better risk analysis for the decision for further testing and evaluation for those with positive test results. Preterm labor and birth is a cause of serious concern due to the possibility of severe complications. By utilizing a fetal fibronectin test, medical teams are better equipped to design a care plan appropriate to a pregnant woman's specific needs.



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