

### 39 Weeks = Full Term Pregnancy

The last month of pregnancy is an endurance test for a lot of women. Another little person has taken up residence inside your body. This little person may be wreaking havoc on your sleep and your appetite. Not to mention the frequent bathroom breaks because your sweet little angel is dancing on your bladder. You may be nervous about the delivery. It can be tempting to “just get it over with”. You may be excited to move on to the parenting phase of having children. However, research has found that there are numerous benefits to staying pregnant for at least 39 weeks. Planning an induction or a c-section, unless it is for medical reasons, can cause stress on the infant and the pregnant woman. Letting nature take its course and waiting for labor to happen naturally gives a baby the best start in life.

I know what you may be thinking. What difference is a week or two going to make? Well, one week may not be much to the average adult, but infants grow and develop at a rapid rate. During the last months of pregnancy, the baby is developing and preparing to live in the world outside the womb.

Here are just a few of the benefits to waiting till 39 weeks:

- The baby develops an extra layer of fat for insulation. This fat layer helps the baby regulate temperature once they are in the outside world.
- The baby’s lungs reach maturity during the last weeks of pregnancy. *Surfactant* will grow in the babies lungs. This material is very important as it keeps the air sacs in the lungs from sticking together once the baby starts to breathe air.
- The baby’s liver grows and is better able to remove toxins from the infant’s body once it is born.

- The baby practices sucking their thumb to prepare for the sucking motion needed for eating on the outside.

Most importantly, during the last weeks of pregnancy and throughout the first three years of life, babies' brains develop at an astonishing rate. The more developed an infant's brain is at birth, the easier time the baby will have dealing with all the stimulants they are about to be exposed to in the outside world. Worried about your baby growing too much or becoming too large before delivery? No worries, infant growth slows down during the last weeks of pregnancy.

Use your final weeks of pregnancy to protect yourself as well as your new infant. Talk to your Doctor about getting immunizations during the last trimester of pregnancy. If pregnant women get immunizations, the infant is exposed to the immunizations inside the womb, and the better they will be at fighting germs and staying healthy during the first months after birth. During the last weeks of pregnancy, infants absorb antibodies from the placenta to fight off infection for the first 6 months of life. Who doesn't want their baby to be born with a strong immune system when they encounter all their new family members that want to snuggle.

For further information regarding this article please contact Debra Goniwicha, MSW, at the Center for Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 12 Executive Park Drive NE, Atlanta, Georgia, 30329. You can also phone us at 404-712-9829 or visit our website at <http://www.emory.edu/MSACD>

The Center for Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development is funded by the Georgia

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

