

Placenta Previa In Pregnancy: What You Need To Know

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Alice Marris was shocked to learn that she had [placenta previa](#) during her first pregnancy. Her doctor made the discovery during her second trimester ultrasound exam. "I had never even heard of it, so to be suddenly diagnosed with placenta previa was scary," says the Austin, Texas, mom who is now the parent of a healthy 1-year-old boy. This condition affects about 1 in every 200 [pregnancies](#), but many moms have never heard of it. The good news: Although it is stressful to receive a diagnosis of placenta previa, it is possible for your doctor to manage it and increase your chances of delivering a healthy baby.

What is placenta previa?

Placenta previa occurs when the placenta implants in the wrong place. "A normal placenta is located near the top of the uterus, however, during placenta previa the placenta has shifted towards the bottom of the uterus potentially covering the cervix partially or completely," says [Francisco Arredondo](#), MD, an ob-gyn specializing in endocrinology and infertility at [RMA of Texas](#), a fertility clinic with offices in Austin and San Antonio. The low lying placenta can cause severe bleeding before or during the delivery.

What causes the condition?

Placenta previa is caused by the placenta implanting at the bottom of the uterus, around two weeks after conception —

not by something the mom-to-be does or doesn't do, says [Linda Rice](#), a certified nurse midwife at [Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates](#) in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. But, there is a chance that the placenta can move to the correct place later in the first trimester, so doctors typically wait until the second trimester [ultrasound](#) to diagnose placenta previa.

What are the signs of placenta previa?

[Bleeding without pain](#) is often an early warning sign of placenta previa. The bleeding can range from light to heavy. "At any point during a pregnancy, an expectant mom should alert her doctor if she notices vaginal bleeding," says Dr. Arredondo. Some women may also experience [contractions](#).

How is the condition treated?

There is no medication for placenta previa, so many doctors will recommend that patients with the condition go on bed rest. "This means as little physical exertion as possible, no sexual intercourse, and no vaginal exams for the duration of the pregnancy," says Dr. Arredondo. The goal is to prevent vaginal bleeding, which can lead to preterm birth and hemorrhaging. If bleeding is severe, you might be admitted to the hospital and given medications to prevent premature birth. "If the placenta does not migrate away from the cervix, a C-section will be done to ensure the safety of the baby and minimize any potential complications during the pregnancy," he adds.

Who is most likely to get placenta previa?

While there is nothing you can do to prevent placenta previa, there are certain risk factors for the condition:

- You're over 35
- You're pregnant with multiples
- You've had placenta previa during a previous pregnancy
- You've had prior surgeries involving the uterus, such as a C-section and/or removal of uterine fibroids

Marris remained on bed rest after her diagnosis and delivered her son via C-section. "We both went home from the hospital happy and healthy," she says.

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