

Identical Twins – Double Trouble!



How are twins identical?

Identical twins happen when a single fertilised egg – an embryo – splits into two separate babies very early in development. In some cases, there are two totally separate (though identical!) babies in two separate sacs, with two separate placentas. In the common situation, though, the babies share part or all of one placenta. The babies are usually in two separate sacs. This situation is called ‘di-amniotic’ (meaning each twin is in a separate bag of waters) ‘mono-chorionic’ (meaning that the twins’ umbilical cords attach to a common placenta) – or ‘MCDA’ for short.

Are there any particular issues with an identical twin pregnancy?

Identical twin pregnancies can pose special challenges for both the babies and their mother. All twin pregnancies carry a higher risk of complications such as preterm (‘premature’) birth, gestational diabetes, and high blood pressure. However, when twins are identical additional potential complications can occur.

Twin-twin transfusion – This occurs because blood vessels in the placenta can allow blood from one twin to cross to the other twin. This can be a very serious complication if it occurs, and twin-twin transfusion can occur and progress quickly. For this reason, very regular and careful ultrasound examinations must be performed. These are required at least fortnightly, and sometimes more commonly.

The optimal time for birth of identical twins is about 37 weeks, and decisions about the way the babies are born can be complex and difficult to make.

