

Premature birth may increase risk of epilepsy later in life

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Being born prematurely may increase your risk of developing epilepsy as an adult, according to a new study published in the October 4, 2011, issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

"We found a strong connection between preterm birth and risk of [epilepsy](#) and the risk appears to increase dramatically the earlier the birth occurs during pregnancy," said study author Casey Crump, MD, PhD, of Stanford University in Stanford, California. "More effective prevention of preterm birth is urgently needed to reduce the burden of epilepsy later in life."

For the study, 630,090 adults in Sweden ages 25 to 37 were followed for four years. Participants who developed epilepsy were identified through hospital records as well as monitoring prescriptions for drugs that treat epilepsy. Of the participants, 27,953 had been born prematurely and 922, or 0.15 percent of the total [study participants](#), had been hospitalized for epilepsy during the study.

The study found adults who were born very preterm (23-31 weeks [gestational age](#)) were five times more likely to be hospitalized for epilepsy as an adult compared to those adults who were born full-term (37-42 weeks gestational age). Adults who were born between 32-34 weeks of pregnancy were almost twice as likely to be hospitalized for epilepsy and adults who were born between 35 and 36 weeks were one-and-a-half times as likely to be hospitalized for epilepsy compared to those born full-term. The results remained the same regardless of [fetal growth](#), birth order or related disorders that may be associated with preterm birth.

"Other disorders were also more common in people born preterm, including cerebral palsy and other diseases of the [central nervous system](#)," said Crump. "It's possible that the association between preterm birth and epilepsy may be explained by a

decreased flow of oxygen to the brain in the uterus during pregnancy that leads to preterm birth or abnormal brain development resulting from preterm birth itself."

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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