

# Parents of premature babies as happy as other parents by adulthood

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Parents of very premature or very low birth weight babies have the same life satisfaction as parents of full-term babies, when their children reach adulthood- according to new research by the University of Warwick.

Led by Professor Dieter Wolke from the Department of Psychology and Warwick Medical School, this pioneering study traced the lives of children who were born very preterm (VP), or with a very [low birth weight](#) (VLBW)—and their [parents](#)—from birth until they turned twenty-seven. VP [babies](#) are defined as having been born at fewer than 32 weeks gestation, and VLBW babies were born weighing less than 1500 grams. The researchers analysed the [health](#) and wellbeing of 446 parents of babies born in Germany between January 1985 and March 1986. 219 were parents of VP or VLBW babies, and the remaining 227 had babies born at full-term (37-42 weeks gestation). The parents were asked to fill in the World Health Organisation's Quality of Life Assessment, which assesses physical health (e.g. energy and fatigue), psychological health (e.g. positive feelings), social relationships and environment (e.g. financial resources, home environment). They also completed the reliable 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale, and rated their agreement with statements such as: "In most ways my life is close to my ideal," "The conditions of my life are excellent," "I am satisfied with my life."

By the time their children had reached the age of twenty-seven, their [life satisfaction](#) was equal in scores to that of parents of healthy term babies.

The study showed that parents of VP and VLBW babies were confronted

with more challenging situations during their children's life: their child's different start in neonatal intensive care, a much higher rate of disability (e.g. 38.8% of VP/VLBW had disability in childhood compared to 5.7% of term born), poorer schooling, mental health problems and peer relationship problems of very [preterm children](#) that were challenging for parenting.

Lead author Professor Dieter Wolke commented: "This is a testament to resilience, adaptability, and coping of parents of children of very preterm children, and really good news that life can be bright after a very difficult start."

This unique study—which followed all children and families at seven time points, from birth to adulthood of the children—also investigated the challenges in childhood that still affect the quality of life of parents when their children are adults. It was not disability, academic performance, or how good the parent-child relationship was—rather, the crucial factor was whether the children had good mental health and good peer relationships in childhood that determined whether parents had a high quality of life when their children were adults.

Professor Wolke further commented: "What makes parents most satisfied with their own life in the long run is seeing their children grow up happy and have good friends, rather than whether they have a disability or may have academic problems at school. "We should put more emphasis on good mental health and facilitating good peer relationships in children to increase the quality of life of both parents and children. It is important information for counselling of parents of VP and VLBW [children](#) dealing with disability and schooling problems in childhood."

The research, 'Very Preterm Birth and Parents' Quality of Life 27 Years Later', is published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Provided by University of Warwick

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