Twin Pregnancy with Shared Placenta

This material is intended only for patients carrying twins who share a single placenta — a "monochorionic" pregnancy. It is a supplement to our "Caring for Your Twin Pregnancy" handout. Everything in "Caring for Your Twin Pregnancy" about visits, nutrition, aspirin for preeclampsia prevention, weight gain and warning signs still applies. This supplement adds a few extra things to know.

Almost all monochorionic twins are identical. Because they share one placenta, their blood vessels are connected. This connection is usually balanced, but it can become unequal, which is why this type of pregnancy needs closer monitoring. There are two types:

- **Monochorionic-diamniotic (MC/DA):** One placenta, but each baby has its own fluid sac. This is the most common type.
- **Monochorionic-monoamniotic (MC/MA):** One placenta and one shared sac. This is rarer and needs even closer monitoring and earlier delivery.

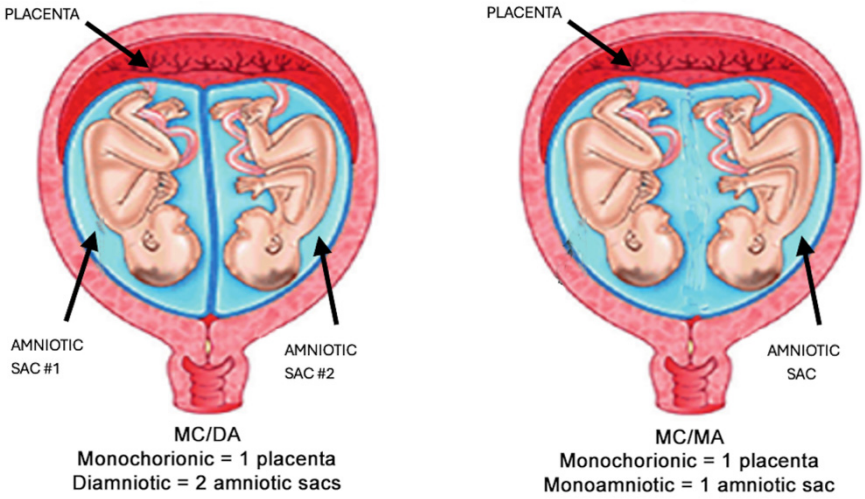

Figure adapted from Tshililo Mashamba, http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.105788, open access under Creative Commons.

Specialist Care

With monochorionic twins, you will often see a maternal-fetal medicine (high-risk pregnancy) specialist for some or all of your care.

Extra Ultrasounds

Many of the problems associated with monochorionic twins cause no symptoms at first and can only be found on ultrasound. Keeping ALL appointments is extremely important for early detection. You may have:

- Ultrasounds every 2 weeks starting at 16 weeks, continuing until delivery, to check the fluid around each baby and their bladders and blood flow (Doppler studies).
- A growth ultrasound every 2 to 4 weeks to make sure both babies are growing well and evenly.
- A heart ultrasound (fetal echocardiogram) because shared-placenta twins have a higher chance of heart problems.

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Complications Specific to Sharing a Placenta

Your care team will be watching for these potential complications.

- **Twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome (TTTS):** Blood moves unevenly through the shared vessels, so one baby gets too much and the other too little, which shows up as too much fluid around one baby and too little around the other. It happens in about 1 in 10 shared-placenta pregnancies, usually mid-pregnancy. It's treatable, often with a laser procedure, especially when caught early.
- **Twin anemia-polycythemia sequence (TAPS):** A slower, subtler version of uneven blood sharing, where one baby becomes low on blood and the other has too much. This is found using blood-flow measurements during ultrasound.
- **Selective fetal growth restriction (sFGR):** One baby grows noticeably slower than the other because of how the shared placenta is divided.

Extra Warning Signs for Shared-Placenta Twins

Call your care team right away if you notice:

- A sudden or rapid increase in the size of your belly
- New shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Belly tightening, cramping or contractions
- Pelvic pressure or a feeling of heaviness
- A noticeable decrease in the babies' movements
- Any vaginal bleeding or fluid leaking

These can be early signs of a rapid fluid buildup or other complications and need to be checked promptly.

Delivery Timing for Shared-Placenta Twins

Because of the shared placenta, these twins are usually delivered earlier than twins with separate placentas.

- **Separate sacs (MC/DA):** usually between 34 and 37 weeks
- **Shared sac (MC/MA):** usually around 32–34 weeks, by cesarean

Starting around 32 weeks, you'll likely have extra testing of the babies' well-being, such as non-stress tests.

The exact timing and delivery method depend on how your pregnancy is going, and your care team will discuss the plan with you as it develops.

The Bottom Line

Twin pregnancies do best with close monitoring, good nutrition, appropriate weight gain and quick attention to warning signs. If your twins share a placenta, this monitoring is even closer so that problems can be caught and treated early. Keep every appointment, follow your nutrition and supplement plan, stay reasonably active and reach out to your care team whenever something doesn't feel right.

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