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Duration of Pregnancy

Calculating the Date of Birth

Dr. Brown bent back in his swivel chair, tapped together the ends of his fingers, and asked gravely, "When did your last menstrual period begin?"

Rustling unsuccessfully in her handbag for the forgotten memorandum, young Mrs. Smith replied, "Let's see. It was the day of the last concert, you know. Let me think, wasn't it Wednesday, March eighteenth?"

With telegraphic speed, and without the aid of either fingers or calendar—the use of these marks the neophyte—the wise man announced, "Your baby is due on Christmas Day." Mrs. Smith was impressed! It was barely the first of May, and yet this seer foresaw the birth of her child, seven and a half months distant. How did he do it?

The calculation of the expected date of confinement is very simple, absurdly simple. I hesitate to divulge the formula for fear of revealing a guild secret. The rule is: Add seven days to the first day of the last normal menstrual period. Count back three months. In the case of Mrs. Smith, Dr. Brown added seven to March 18, and then counted back—February, January, December. That made the expected date of confinement December 25. The mystic formula is now exposed. In reality, this formula affords a short cut for counting 280 days from any fixed date. In other words, a woman ordinarily delivers nine months and seven days from the beginning date of her last menstrual period.

It must be stressed that the 280 days is an average figure, which means that a vast number of pregnancies terminate before the 280th day, a vast number after it, and only relatively few on the exact day. At best the calculated or expected date of confinement is an approximate date. This is an important fact for the pregnant couple as well as relatives and other interested persons to remember. It is all too common for panic to become general when "B" day ar-

rives, then passes, and yet there is no sign of labor. Telephones soon begin ringing, and on each occasion the patient is unhappily greeted by the salutation, "Haven't you gone to the hospital yet?"

What Are the Chances of Delivering on Time?

In over 17,000 cases of pregnancy carried beyond the twenty-seventh week, 54 per cent delivered before 280 days, 4 per cent on the 280th day, and 42 per cent later. Forty-six per cent had their babies either the week before or the week after the calculated date, and 74 per cent within a two-week period before or after the anticipated day of birth.

On the basis of these data one can calculate the likelihood which the average woman faces when carrying a single infant, not twins, of having her baby, during each week after the twenty-seventh week from the first day of her last menstrual period.

Weeks	*Days*	*Approximate Chance*
28	189-196	1:625
29	196-203	1:625
30	203-210	1:525
31	210-217	1:240
32	217-224	1:240
33	224-231	1:135
34	231-238	1:115
35	238-245	1:58
36	245-252	1:39
37	252-259	1:22
38	259-266	1:11
39	266-273	1:5
40	273-280	1:3½
41	280-287	1:5⅔
42	287-294	1:12
43	294-301	1:34
44	301-308	1:74
45	308-315	1:140
46+	315+	1:140

Another reliable study has shown that 40 per cent of women go into labor within a ten-day period—five days before and five days after the calculated date, and nearly two-thirds within plus or minus ten days of the expected time.

Factors Affecting the Delivery Date

Ordinarily the woman with a consistent, regular menstrual cycle is more likely to have a baby at the 280th day than the