Definition of Term Pregnancy

ABSTRACT: In the past, the period from 3 weeks before until 2 weeks after the estimated date of delivery was considered “term,” with the expectation that neonatal outcomes from deliveries in this interval were uniform and good. Increasingly, however, research has shown that neonatal outcomes, especially respiratory morbidity, vary depending on the timing of delivery within this 5-week gestational age range. To address this lack of uniformity, a work group was convened in late 2012, which recommended that the label “term” be replaced with the designations early term (37 0/7 weeks of gestation through 38 6/7 weeks of gestation), full term (39 0/7 weeks of gestation through 40 6/7 weeks of gestation), late term (41 0/7 weeks of gestation through 41 6/7 weeks of gestation), and postterm (42 0/7 weeks of gestation and beyond) to more accurately describe deliveries occurring at or beyond 37 0/7 weeks of gestation. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine endorse and encourage the uniform use of the work group’s recommended new gestational age designations by all clinicians, researchers, and public health officials to facilitate data reporting, delivery of quality health care, and clinical research.
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Uniform definitions of term are predicated on a uniform method of determining gestational age. The work group provided a method for determination of gestational age (5) that, like other similar methods (6), focused on a hierarchy of clinical and ultrasonographic criteria. Individual methods may differ in the details of when and how ultrasonographic biometry should be used to change estimated date of delivery based on last menstrual period; however, it is not the purpose of this document to establish the priority of one method over another. The College and SMFM are working with other expert groups to establish evidence-based consensus on criteria for determining gestational age.

References


Box 1. Recommended Classification of Deliveries From 37 Weeks of Gestation
- Early term: 37 0/7 weeks through 38 6/7 weeks
- Full term: 39 0/7 weeks through 40 6/7 weeks
- Late term: 41 0/7 weeks through 41 6/7 weeks
- Postterm: 42 0/7 weeks and beyond