Press Release

Preterm babies are more likely to develop cognitive and other difficulties later

Such children also more likely to develop ADHD

New Delhi, 14 October 2017: As per a new large-scale study conducted among more than 60,000 children, it has been found that preterm babies are at a higher risk of developing cognitive, motor, and behavioral difficulties in later childhood, affecting even their later school performance. Preterm children are also twice as likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that every year, about 15 million babies are born prematurely around the world amounting to more than one in 10 babies born globally. The rate of preterm birth across 184 countries ranges from 5% to 18% of babies born. In India, the figure stands at 3.5 million babies out of the 27 million babies born every year.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, “A premature birth is one that happens before 37 weeks of pregnancy. A normal pregnancy usually lasts about 40 weeks.

A baby born prematurely has less time to develop in the womb and often has complicated medical problems. Many preterm babies who survive suffer from various disabilities like cerebral palsy, sensory deficits, learning disabilities and respiratory illnesses. The morbidity often extends to later life, causing physical, psychological, and economic stress to the individual and the family.”

Preterm babies are small in size, sharper looking and have a disproportionately large head, less rounded features than a full-term baby, fine hair covering much of the body and low body temperature. Labored breathing or respiratory distress and lack of reflexes for sucking and swallowing are further signs of a preterm birth.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “While preterm births cannot be attributed to one particular reason, the predisposing risk factors include age at pregnancy; previous preterm birth; multiple pregnancies; infections and chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure; stress; genetic factors and nutritional disorders. Lifestyle is increasingly becoming an important factor for
preterm births. Identification of risk factors and educating the pregnant woman about the signs and symptoms of preterm labor during antenatal care can prevent preterm births.”

Here are some measures women can take to avert the risk of preterm delivery.

**Do not miss antenatal care** This is the best way to avert any preterm labor and identify signs. The doctor should be able to advice on how to eat right, what is the ideal weight, and what can be harmful for the baby.

**Understand your risks** Some women are at more at risk of delivering early. This is truer for those who have had a prior preterm delivery; who smoke or drink; have pre-existing health problems, etc. Understanding these can help you cope better.

**Watch your weight** Find out how much weight gain is apt for your body type and the baby. Too much weight gain can also cause complications like gestational diabetes and preeclampsia. Talk to your doctor about the recommended weight and eat accordingly. Ask your doctor about a healthy exercise plan.

**Eat right** Consume a nutritious diet as it is vital to the development of the fetus. Whole-wheat carbs, healthy sources of protein and dairy, and an abundance of fruits and vegetables is key. Avoid tobacco, alcohol & other non-prescribed drugs.

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**About IMA:** Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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