

The Midwife.

Central Midwives Board.

First Examination.

August 3rd, 1955. From 2 to 5 p.m.

1. Describe the cervix uteri.
What changes may occur in it during pregnancy, labour and the puerperium?
2. Discuss the important points of antenatal care during the last three months of pregnancy.
3. Describe your management from the early part of the first stage of labour to delivery of a patient whose baby is in the occipito-posterior position.
4. What abnormal conditions may occur in the breast during the lying-in period?
How would you recognise them?
5. To what infections is the newborn baby specially liable?
How would you try to reduce the chances of their occurrence?
6. What complications of micturition may occur during pregnancy, labour and the puerperium?

Will It Be Twins—or Quintuplets?

By Dr. W. Schweisheimer.

New Statistical Knowledge on Multiple Births.

THE TWO WORLD-FAMOUS sets of quintuplets—the five Dionne girls and the Diligenti quintuplets of Argentina—were both born in the same decade (1934 and 1943). Other cases of quintuplets have been reported but in each instance at least one of the babies either was stillborn or failed to survive more than a short time after birth. (One of the Dionne quintuplets died at the age of 20.)

Tendency to Multiple Births.

Quintuplets are rare, but even twins, which account by far for the greatest number of plural births, are relatively infrequent. Based on millions of births all over the world a law has been discovered which seems to regulate these conditions—approximately. On the average in one out of every 85 to 90 pregnancies plural births develop within the mother. It has been calculated that twins occur about once in every 80 pregnancies; triplets about once in 6,400; quadruplets about once in 512,000; and quintuplets about once in 40,960,000.

These are only approximative values, of course. More exact figures are contained in a recent study of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company which is based on births registered in the United States during the period 1933-1950. According to this study, twins occurred in about 1 per cent. of the 48½ million confinements, or, to be more exact, in one out of every 92 confinements. Triplets occurred once in about 9,600 confinements, and quadruplets once in about every 657,000 confinements.

The Scandinavian countries are said to have particularly high rates for twins.

The number of offspring produced by different species of animals is extremely different. Higher animals, on the average, have less offspring than lower animals. As a rule, one egg gives rise to one individual. When it is less probable that the eggs will be obstructed because of better care, fewer eggs are released from the ovary.

In fish, which abandon their eggs immediately after laying, hundreds of eggs are liberated simultaneously in order to guarantee the survival of a sufficient number of offspring. In cats and dogs which bear several young in a single litter, several eggs are expelled from the ovaries within a short while, and each egg develops into a new individual.

Age of the Mother and Multiple Births.

The likelihood that a mother will have a plural birth depends upon various factors. Age of the mother has a considerable bearing on the chances of a single or plural confinement, according to the figures of the Metropolitan Life. The relative frequency of multiple births is least among mothers under age 20. It increases with advance in age to a maximum for mothers in their late 30s—and then falls off towards the end of reproductive life.

For teen-age mothers, the chances that a confinement will result in twins or triplets, are only 6 in 1,000. For those aged 35—39 years, however, plural births are almost three times as frequent, or better than 17 in 1,000.

Race of the Parent is Important Too.

The likelihood of a multiple birth also depends upon the race of the parent. The chances that a nonwhite mother will have twins are 13 in 1,000—or one fourth greater than they are for white mothers. The disparity between the two groups is even larger for confinements yielding more than two babies. Thus, triplets are, relatively, one and three-quarter times as likely among nonwhite mothers as among the white, and quadruplets are almost four times as likely.

Other statistics say that only Negroes have comparatively more twin births than white mothers, while the other non-white races have fewer twins.

Many twin deliveries are premature. But there is no need that the birth of twins means actually more labour for the mother than the delivery of a single baby. It all depends on the position of the children in the mother's womb. But twins usually are smaller in size and this makes birth labour easier. The combined weight of the twins though is usually greater than that of a single normal full-term child.

Not even identical twins are always of the same size and same weight. One of those one-egged twins may be greater and heavier at birth, probably because his heart was originally more powerful.

Two Kinds of Twins.

There are two kinds of twins, they are fundamentally different. Identical or duplicate twins come from a single fertilized egg which shortly after it begins to grow, splits in half to form two individuals. Identical twins are always of the same sex, they closely resemble each other, boys or girls. Those are the twins whose close resemblance makes it hard even for their parents to tell who of their twin-children is who. Those are the twins whose strange fortune has been described in novels and comedies of all sorts such as Shakespeare's "Comedy of Errors." Even their fingerprints are essentially the same.

On the contrary, there is no such similarity among fraternal or unidentical twins. Fraternal twins are the product of two different eggs each of which has been simultaneously matured by the mother and has been fertilized. There is no need for fraternal twins to be of the same sex, and their degree of resemblance or difference in later life varies widely. Fraternal twins are no more alike or not alike than the average brother and sister.

Recently an unusual case has been described in medical literature when two baby-boys were born at the same time from the same mother, but they were not twins in the usual sense. Such a "one in a million" birth of two sons, each from a separate womb in the same mother, has been recorded in a Brooklyn hospital. Double wombs are rare in women, but they are common in animals such as opossums and kangaroos. These boys, though born to the same mother on the same day—as was predicted by the doctor—were not really twins because they had matured in separate wombs.

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