

Lung function of moderately premature babies is reduced at 8-9 years but may improve with age

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The negative effects that premature birth can have on the lungs of babies could be as severe in moderately premature babies as those born extremely prematurely but may be reversed in their teenage years, according to a new study.

The research will be presented at the European Respiratory Society Annual Congress in Amsterdam today (27 September 2011).

Normal pregnancy lasts 40 weeks, which allows enough time for the infant to fully grow and develop before birth. Babies born prematurely have [immature lungs](#), which can cause severe [breathing difficulties](#) such as [respiratory distress syndrome](#) (RDS).

The researchers examined the [lung function](#) of children at the age of 8^{1/2} yrs and again at the age of 14^{1/2} yrs using a spirometry test, which measures how well the lungs function. They compared children born at various stages of prematurity comparing their results to those born on time.

The results showed that those born moderately early at 33^{1/2} weeks gestation had significantly lower lung functions at the age of 8^{1/2} yrs when compared to those born on time. When the groups were tested again at 14^{1/2} yrs, the results showed that the lung function of the children born moderately preterm improved.

This study is the first to show that moderately preterm-born children have reduced lung function at 8[?][?] yrs of age but these difficulties could improve as the child grows older.

Mrs Sarah Kotecha from Cardiff University, lead author of the study, said: "There has been a lot of research demonstrating the negative effects that extreme premature birth can have on the lung function of children, but limited data on the lung function of moderately preterm born children, especially as they grow older.

"Ours is the first study to highlight these deficits of lung function in children born moderately prematurely and the improvements as children grow older. The number of babies who survive [premature birth](#) has increased over the past 30 years and it is encouraging to see that these children improve as they grow older."

Provided by European Lung Foundation

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