

Coming to Terms with Unexpected Birth Defects

By Amy Bentley



Dr. Irfan Ahmad
CHOC Children's
Neonatologist

Dr. Ahmad served as chief fellow and completed his neonatal-perinatal fellowship at the University of California Irvine Medical Center. He completed his pediatric internship and residency at the University of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City. Dr. Ahmad is an associate professor of Pediatrics at UCI and also the director of the Surgical Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at CHOC. His current focus is on babies born with congenital anomalies that can be treated through surgery.

Dr. Ahmad's philosophy of care: "My philosophy is to provide evidence-based care which can benefit both the child and the family."

EDUCATION:

Aga Khan University Medical College,
Karachi, Pakistan

BOARD CERTIFICATIONS:

Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine Pediatrics

COMMON BIRTH DEFECTS

Common birth defects include heart defects, cleft lip and cleft palate, Down syndrome and spina bifida. Congenital heart defects are the most common type of birth defect in the United States, affecting nearly 1 percent of, or about 40,000, births per year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Birth defects can be minor to severe. "Some of these can be corrected by surgery and some can be treated by involving many different physicians with different specialties," says Dr. Ahmad.

COPING LONG-TERM

"The most important thing for the parents is they still have to love their baby because all babies are precious," says Dr. Ahmad. "As these babies grow up, we have the ability to provide these babies developmental help to cope." Parents can reach out to the Regional

Over 20

APPROXIMATE PERCENT OF
INFANT DEATHS CAUSED BY
BIRTH DEFECTS



Center of Orange County for help and therapy, public school districts offer assistance to disabled children, and pediatricians are a great source of information and resources as well. "Try to learn as much about the condition as possible. This will help parents cope and make sure that their baby gets the best possible care," says Dr. Ahmad.

PREVENTING BIRTH DEFECTS

One of the best things a pregnant woman can do for her baby is to take good care of her health. Not all birth defects can be prevented but there are some things a woman can do before and during pregnancy to increase the chance of having a healthy baby, says Dr. Ahmad. They include:

- Taking folic acid before becoming pregnant and during pregnancy to help prevent neural tube defects (defects of the brain and spine).
- If the woman is diabetic, making sure her diabetes is under control. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to different malformations and problems for the baby.
- Avoiding alcohol use while pregnant. Drinking alcohol while pregnant can cause fetal alcohol syndrome.



Ranked Among the Nation's Top Children's Hospitals for Neonatology

Recognized as one of the leading neonatology programs in the nation, CHOC Children's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) combines the latest in life-saving technology and trained neonatal specialists to provide care for the tiniest patients — most often premature babies suffering from respiratory and circulatory problems. Our team is committed to providing family-centered care and is dedicated to listening to and honoring each family's perspectives, choices, values and culture.

Learn more at
choc.org/NICU



About 1
in every 33
babies

NUMBER OF BABIES BORN
WITH A BIRTH DEFECT IN
THE U.S. EACH YEAR

1 in 691

BABIES BORN ANNUALLY
WITH DOWN SYNDROME

