Genetic disorders in newborns

Genetic disorders occur when a problem in the baby's chromosomes or genes causes physical abnormalities or illnesses.

In our body, we have millions of cells. In each cell, there are 46 chromosomes, found in 23 matching pairs. Half of the chromosomes are passed on from a person's mother, and half from their father. These chromosomes carry our DNA, or genes, which are the instructions for how we look and how our body develops and functions. These instructions range from our eye color to our risk for disease.

When a harmful change occurs in these instructions, it can change the way a baby develops. Babies with genetic disorders can be at risk of slow mental and physical development, physical abnormalities, and lifelong illnesses.

Risk Factors for Genetic Disorders

Factors that increase your risk of having a baby with a genetic disorder include:

- Family history of a genetic disorder
- Prior child with a genetic disorder
- One parent has a chromosomal abnormality
- Advanced maternal age (35 or older)
- Advanced paternal age (40 or older)
- Multiple miscarriages or prior stillbirth

It is important to know that some birth defects, developmental delays, and/or illnesses can be caused by prenatal exposure to drugs, alcohol, or other environmental factors.

Testing for Genetic Disorders

There are two types of testing for genetic disorders:

1. **Screening tests** – these tests check the risk of your baby having certain genetic disorders
2. **Diagnostic tests** – these tests can detect if certain genetic disorders are actually present in the baby