

GLOSSARY

As this is a combined glossary for all six modules, the terms below may not necessarily be found in this module.

A

Abortion

The term refers to the termination of pregnancy from whatever cause before the foetus is capable of extrauterine life.

Complete abortion is the expulsion from the uterus of all the products of conception, which is more likely to occur before the eighth week of pregnancy.

Incomplete abortion is the partial expulsion of the products of conception. All or part of the placenta may be retained resulting in profuse bleeding. Usually occurs in the second trimester of pregnancy. Women who seek emergency treatment for complications of abortion, whether they have had a spontaneous or induced abortion, are most often diagnosed with incomplete abortion.

Induced abortion refers to the termination of pregnancy through deliberate interference to end the pregnancy. Induced abortion may take place in a safe health care setting and in accordance with the law and health policy guidelines or it may occur outside of the health care system and the provisions of the law.

Inevitable abortion involves vaginal bleeding, abdominal cramping and progressive dilation of the cervix, with or without rupture of the membranes. It is impossible for the pregnancy to continue and eventual expulsion of the products of conception will occur.

Missed abortion occurs when the fetus dies and is retained in the uterus. The dead conceptus will be expelled eventually, although blood coagulation disorders may develop in cases of missed abortion which persist for more than 6–8 weeks.

Septic abortion

An abortion (loss of pregnancy during the first 22 weeks) that is followed by infection of the uterus and may spread throughout the genital tract causing fever and chills, foul-smelling vaginal discharge, pelvic pain and septicaemia. Septic abortion happens most commonly where facilities and standards are poor.

Spontaneous abortion refers to terminated pregnancy for which no deliberate steps have been taken to end the pregnancy. Spontaneous abortion, which is sometimes referred to as miscarriage, affects approximately 10–15% of all known or suspected pregnancies.

Threatened abortion involves vaginal bleeding with or without cervical dilatation. The symptoms may resolve and a viable pregnancy may continue. If the symptoms continue, the pregnancy will result in an inevitable, complete or incomplete abortion.

Unsafe abortion refers to the termination of pregnancy by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal standards of care or both.

Abscess	A localized collection of pus in any part of the body due to infection.
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.
Amnion	The innermost of the membranes enveloping the baby in the uterus and which produces and contains the amniotic fluid.
Amniotic fluid	The fluid produced and contained within the amnion. During the latter half of pregnancy it also contains fluid from the fetal lungs and kidneys. This fluid provides space for unimpeded fetal growth and, in late pregnancy and in labour, it equalizes the pressure exerted by contractions, equalizes the temperature and provides some nutritive substances for the fetus.
Amniotic fluid embolism	This rare but often fatal condition is caused by amniotic fluid entering the maternal circulation via the uterine sinuses of the placental bed. It is most likely to occur in labour or in the immediate postpartum period, following very strong contractions. Symptoms and signs include cyanosis, chest pain, dyspnoea, blood-stained, frothy sputum, convulsions and collapse.
Amniotomy	Surgical rupture of the fetal membranes to induce labour.
Anaemia	A reduction in the number of red blood cells or in the amount of haemoglobin present in them. Anaemia can be caused by excessive blood loss, or by not eating enough foods rich in iron or folic acid. Other causes are excessive breakdown of red cells (e.g. in malaria), or failure to manufacture them.
Analgesic	A drug given to relieve pain.
Aneurysm	A sac formed by the dilatation of the wall of an artery.
Anoxia	A state of being deprived of oxygen.
Antepartum	Before delivery.
Antepartum haemorrhage	Bleeding from the genital tract at any time after the 22nd week of pregnancy and before the birth of the baby. There are two main causes of antepartum haemorrhage, placenta praevia and abruptio placentae.
Anterior	Situated in front or directed towards the front.
Antero posterior	From front to back.
Antibiotic	Drugs derived from living micro-organisms which destroy or inhibit the growth of pathogenic bacteria. They are given to treat infection.
Antibody	A protein produced in the body to fight micro-organisms or foreign substances which may enter the body. In pregnancy, maternal antibodies to specific conditions are transferred across the placenta to the fetus. This gives the baby a passive immunity to some diseases in the first few months of life.

Anticonvulsant drug	A drug which controls convulsions.
Antihypertensive	A drug given to reduce high blood pressure.
Antipyretic	A drug given to reduce fever.
Antiseptic	A substance that prevents infection by killing certain bacteria on skin or body tissues. Antiseptics include surgical spirits, chlorhexidine and iodine.
Anuria	No urine is produced by the kidneys. This life-threatening condition may be associated with obstetric emergencies such as severe haemorrhage, eclampsia and septic shock.
Apex	The top or highest point.
Apnoea	Absence of breathing.
Aseptic technique or asepsis	Aseptic technique refers to special precautions taken to achieve a bacteria-free environment, e.g. at delivery or at surgical operations. Precautions include use of the correct hand-washing technique, correct use of sterile instruments and drapes, the wearing of appropriate clothing by staff, e.g. gown, cap and gloves.
Asphyxia	A condition in which there is a deficiency of oxygen in the blood and an increase in carbon dioxide. If the baby fails to breathe at birth, it suffers from asphyxia and requires urgent resuscitation.
Asymmetrical	Unequal size or shape of two normally similar structures. The pelvis may be asymmetrical if distorted by disease, injury or congenital malformation.
Atonic	Lack of muscle tone.
Atonic postpartum bleeding	Occurs from the placental site because the uterus is unable to contract adequately and thus the blood vessels are not compressed and bleeding is not controlled. Any condition that interferes with uterine contraction, such as a retained placenta, will predispose to atonic bleeding.
Augment	To increase: in augmented labour, oxytocin may be used to increase the effectiveness of contractions if progress is slow.
Avoidable factors	Factors causing or contributing to maternal death where there is departure from generally accepted standards of care.
Axilla	The armpit.
B	
Bacteria	Microscopic, unicellular organisms which, if pathogenic, can cause disease. They reproduce extremely quickly, thus can rapidly multiply in the body.
Bacteriuria	Presence of bacteria in the urine

Bandl's ring	The area between upper and lower uterine segments when it becomes visible and/or palpable during obstructed labour. It is caused by the extreme thickening of the upper segment and the dangerous thinning of the lower segment and is a sign of impending rupture of the uterus.
Bartholin's glands	Two small mucous-producing glands, one on each side of the vaginal orifice.
Bimanual compression of uterus	A manoeuvre to arrest severe postpartum haemorrhage after delivery of the placenta when the uterus is atonic. The right hand is inserted into the vagina and closed to form a fist which is placed in the anterior vaginal fornix. The left hand is pressed deeply into the abdomen behind the uterus, applying pressure against the posterior wall of the uterus. Pressure is maintained until bleeding is controlled.
Bolus	A dose of a pharmaceutical preparation which is given all at once.
Broad ligament	Two folds of peritoneum draped over the uterus which extend to the side walls of the pelvis and help to keep the uterus in its place. They contain the uterine tubes, parametrium, blood vessels and nerves.
C	
Capsular decidua	The part of the decidua which lies over the developing embryo during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
Caput succedaneum	Swelling of the fetal scalp due to pressure from the cervix. The swelling may be exaggerated in obstructed labour.
Cavity	A hollow place or space in the body.
Cephalic presentation	The head (i.e. cephal) lies in the lower pole of the uterus.
Cephalopelvic disproportion	A misfit between the fetal head and the pelvis through which it has to pass. It may be caused by a small or abnormally-shaped pelvis, or a large or abnormal baby.
Cerebral haemorrhage	Bleeding in the brain due to a ruptured blood vessel.
Cerebrospinal fluid	The liquid contained inside the brain and around the spinal cord.
Cervical os	The internal os is the opening between the cervix and the body of the uterus and the external os is the opening between the cervix and the vagina. After effacement of the cervix in labour, there is only os and that lies between the lower segment of the uterus and the vagina.
Chorioamnionitis	Infection of the membranes that envelop the fetus in the uterus.
Chorion	The outermost of the two membranes which envelope the fetus in the uterus.
Chronic	Prolonged or permanent.

Circulatory overload	Overloading the circulation. This may occur in cases of excessive intravenous infusion of fluids. It leads to respiratory problems due to an accumulation of fluid in the lungs and to cardiac failure.
Coagulation	Formation of a blood clot.
Coagulation failure	Disturbance of the coagulation system resulting in widespread formation of clots, mainly in the capillaries. Eventually haemorrhage occurs because all the clotting factors are depleted. These events result in ischaemic damage within the body organs and, unless urgent treatment is instituted, will result in death. It is triggered by certain conditions which introduce coagulation-promoting factors into the circulation, e.g. abruptio-placentae, severe pre-eclampsia and eclampsia, retained dead fetus after several weeks, amniotic fluid embolism and some very severe infections.
Coccyx	The small bone at the end of the sacrum which is formed by four fused vertebrae. It forms a movable joint with the sacrum and moves backwards out of the way during vaginal delivery, thereby increasing the size of the pelvic outlet.
Coma	A state of unconsciousness from which the person cannot be aroused. The person is said to be in a coma or comatose.
Contraction (of pelvis)	Reduction in size.
Cortical necrosis	Death of the outer part of the substance of an organ (e.g. the kidney).
Crepitations	Dry, crackling sound.
Cross-matching (of blood)	A test of the compatibility of donor and recipient blood performed before transfusion.
Crowning	The moment during birth when the widest presenting diameter of the fetal skull distends the vaginal orifice and the head no longer recedes between contractions.
Cubital fossa	The depression in the part of the arm which is in front of the elbow.
Cyanosis	A bluish discolouration of skin and mucous membranes due to lack of tissue oxygenation.
Cystitis	Infection of the urinary bladder.
D	
Decidua	The name given to the endometrium (innermost layer) of the pregnant uterus. The part of the decidua that is underneath the placenta is the decidua basalis. The part that lines the uterus elsewhere than at the site of placental attachment is the decidua vera or parietalis.

Deep vein thrombosis	The formation of a thrombus (clot) in a deep vein, most commonly in the leg or pelvis. It causes swelling and pain when walking. If a clot detaches itself from the wall of the vein it may be carried in the blood-stream to the heart or lungs causing collapse and, unless immediate resuscitation is successful, death.
Deficiency	A lack of.
Deflexed (head)	Erect head, rather than a flexed head with the chin on the chest. occurs in occipito-posterior positions and may cause prolonged labour because larger presenting diameters of the fetal head have to pass through the pelvis.
Deformity	Distortion of any part of the body. Malformation.
Dehydration	Condition caused by excessive loss of body fluid or by an inadequate intake of fluid. Signs of dehydration include dry mouth, thirst, sunken eyes, skin pinch goes back slowly and reduced urinary output.
Delirium	Disordered state of mind with incoherent speech, hallucinations and excitement. Commonly occurs with high fever.
Diameter	A straight line passing through the centre of a circle or sphere. A number of diameters of the pelvis and fetal skull are described and appropriate measurements given.
Differential diagnosis	Deciding which of two or more conditions may be the cause of symptoms and signs noted.
Direct obstetric death	A death resulting from obstetric complications of the pregnant state (i.e. pregnancy, labour and puerperium), from interventions, omissions, incorrect treatment, or a chain of events resulting from any of the above.
Disseminated intravascular coagulation	Disturbance of the coagulation system triggered by certain conditions (e.g. septic or haemorrhagic shock, eclampsia) and characterized by generalized bleeding. (See coagulation failure).
Distended	Stretched.
Distortion	The state of being twisted out of normal shape.
Diuresis	Passing increased amounts of urine.
Diuretic	A drug that is given to increase the production of urine.
Dorsal position	Lying on the back.
Drowsy	Half asleep, dozing.
Dysentery	Infection in the intestines due to bacteria or parasites, causing pain in the abdomen and frequent stools containing blood, pus or mucous.

E

Eclampsia	A condition peculiar to pregnancy or a newly delivered woman, characterized by fits followed coma. The woman usually has hypertension and proteinuria. The fits may occur in the antepartum, intrapartum or early postpartum periods.
Empathy	Intellectual and emotional awareness and understanding of another person's thoughts, feelings and behaviour, even those that are distressing and disturbing.
Endocarditis	Inflammation of the membrane lining the cavities of the heart.
Endometritis	Infection of the endometrium (inner lining of the uterus).
Endometrium	The innermost layer of the uterus.
Engorged breasts	Painful accumulation of secretion in the breasts, often accompanied by lymphatic and venous stasis and oedema at the onset of lactation. Frequent feeding and ensuring that the baby is correctly positioned at the breast helps to relieve the condition.
Epigastric	The upper middle region of the abdomen.
Episiotomy	A cut made in the perineum just before the head crowns to facilitate delivery. It should not be a routine procedure, but only performed for fetal distress to speed up the birth, before complicated vaginal deliveries, e.g. breech, shoulder dystocia, and for preterm infants to relieve the pressure on their soft skulls, thereby reducing the risk of cerebral injury.
Essential hypertension	High blood pressure occurring without discoverable cause.
Expansile	Capable of stretching.
Extend the knee	To straighten the leg.
Extension (head)	Lengthening. It is the opposite of flexion. Used to describe the mechanism by which the head is born, i.e. after flexion, the head extends to allow the forehead, face and chin to be born.
External	Situated on the outside.
F	
False labour	Painful uterine contractions which are not accompanied by cervical effacement and dilatation. Contractions often irregular and cease spontaneously after a few hours.
Fatal	Ending in death.
Fetal sac	The bag of membranes which envelop the baby in the uterus.
Feto-maternal transfusion	Passage of fetal blood into the blood circulation of the mother, through the placenta.
Fibroids	A benign tumour of the myometrium (muscle of the uterus).

Fistula	An abnormal passage or communication between two organs such as, for example, the urinary bladder and the vagina, i.e. a vesico-vaginal fistula, or the vagina and the rectum, i.e. recto-vaginal fistula. It is a serious complication of obstructed labour and results in urinary or faecal incontinence. Operative repair is usually required.
Flexed	Bent forward.
Flexible	Pliant, i.e. bends easily.
Flexion (head)	Head is bent forward.
Fluctuating	Giving the sensation of wavelike motion on palpation, due to a liquid content (e.g. pus in an abscess).
Foaming	Collection of small bubbles formed in liquid by agitation; froth. Foaming at the mouth: occurs during a fit due to saliva and mucus bubbles.
Fontanelle	A membranous space on the baby's head where two or more sutures meet. Often called the 'soft spots.' The anterior fontanelle is the diamond-shaped membranous space on the front part of the head at the meeting of four suture lines. The posterior fontanelle is the small triangular membranous space on the back part of the head at the meeting of three suture lines.
Fundus	The rounded upper part of the uterus, above the insertion of the fallopian tubes.
G	
Genital mutilation	The traditional surgical practice of cutting away part or all of the external genitalia of a woman. In the most extreme form, called "infibulation", the two sides of the vulva are also stitched together to leave a very small opening.
Genital tract	The pathway formed by the genital organs including the uterine tubes, uterus, cervix, vagina, vulva.
"Gishiri" cut	A traditional practice among the Hausa people of Nigeria whereby the vagina is cut to facilitate delivery when labour is obstructed.
Glycosuria	The presence of glucose (sugar) in the urine.
Grand mal epilepsy	A major epileptic fit followed by loss of consciousness.
Grand multiparity	A woman who has borne five or more children.
Groin	The junctional region between the abdomen and the thigh.
Grouping (of blood)	Determining blood type (A, B, O, AB).
H	
Haematemesis	The vomiting of blood.

Haematocrit	The percentage volume of packed red cells in a blood specimen. This measurement is obtained by centrifugation (spinning very fast) of the specimen. It is a screening test for anaemia.
Haematoma	A localized collection of blood in an organ or tissue due to blood leaking from a blood vessel.
Haemoglobin	The substance in red blood cells which carries oxygen from the lungs to the tissues.
Haemoglobinopathies	Disorders of the blood caused by abnormal forms of haemoglobin (e.g. sickle cell anaemia, thalassaemia). Severe anaemia occurs in these conditions.
Haemolytic anaemia	Anaemia caused by destruction of red blood cells, as in malaria. Haemolytic disease of the newborn may occur as a result of rhesus incompatibility. These babies may require an exchange transfusion after birth.
Haemorrhage	Excessive bleeding from a torn or severed blood vessel. It may occur externally or within the body.
Hemiplegia	Paralysis of one side of the body.
HIV	Human immune deficiency virus.
Hollow (of the sacrum)	The concave anterior surface of the sacrum.
Humerus	The bone that extends from the shoulder to the elbow.
Hydatidiform mole	An abnormal pregnancy resulting in a mass of cysts resembling a bunch of grapes. Termination of pregnancy is required and follow-up is essential because of the risk of chorion carcinoma developing.
Hydration	The absorption of or combination with water.
Hydrocephalus	A condition characterized by accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid within the ventricles of the brain. The baby with hydrocephalus has an enlarged head and a prominent forehead. Severe cases are incompatible with life, but mild cases may be treated by an operation which diverts excess fluid from the brain into the blood stream.
Hyperemesis gravidarum	Excessive vomiting during pregnancy. It is a serious condition which causes dehydration and ketosis and the woman will deteriorate quickly unless appropriate treatment is given. Liver and renal damage may occur leading to coma and death.
Hypertension	High blood pressure.
Hypertonic	Excessive tone. Hypertonic uterine contractions are abnormal and extremely painful, with only a short interval between them. Usually result in fetal distress and may cause rupture of the uterus. Often associated with prolonged and difficult labour, or excessive use of oxytocic drugs to augment or induce labour.
Hyponatraemia	Insufficient sodium (salt) in the blood.

Hypovolaemia	Abnormally low volume of blood circulating in the body. This can happen when the body loses a lot of blood (e.g. in postpartum haemorrhage).
Hypoxia	A diminished oxygen supply to the tissues.
I	
Idiopathic	With no known cause.
Idiopathic thrombocytopenia purpura	Condition of unknown cause characterized by a decrease in the number of blood platelets resulting in inability of the blood to coagulate properly.
Imminent	Soon to happen.
Incision	A surgical cut.
Indirect obstetric death	A death resulting from previous existing disease or disease which developed during pregnancy and which was not due to direct obstetric causes, but which was aggravated (or made worse) by the physiological effects of pregnancy.
Induced labour	A labour that is started artificially by the use of oxytocic drugs and/or by rupturing the membranes.
Infarct	An area of necrosis (dead tissue) in an organ caused by local ischaemia, (i.e. poor blood supply). Placental infarcts may be seen, especially in cases of hypertension in pregnancy.
Infertility	Difficulty or inability to conceive.
Infiltration (of local anaesthetic)	Method of injecting a local anaesthetic into the tissues. Infiltration of the perineum is carried out before an episiotomy is made.
Internal	On the inside.
Intrapartum	Occurring during childbirth.
Intraperitoneal	Within the peritoneal cavity.
Intrauterine death	Death of the fetus in the uterus.
Intrauterine growth retardation (IUGR)	Poor fetal growth in the uterus. The reason is not always known, but it is more likely in cases of malnutrition, anaemia, pre-eclampsia, malaria, tuberculosis and in women who smoke.
Involution of the uterus	Uterus returning to normal size after delivery. Involution occurs by autolysis, (i.e. breaking down) and ischaemia (i.e. reduced blood supply) of excess muscle fibres. It starts soon after birth and is completed within about six weeks.
Ischial spines	The two small protuberances of the pelvis that project into the pelvic cavity and can be felt laterally upon vaginal examination.

Isthmus	The narrow connection between the body of the uterus and the cervix.
K	
Ketoacidosis	A state of electrolyte imbalance with ketosis and lowered blood pH. It may occur in labour if the woman becomes dehydrated and ketotic. The woman with ketosis has sweet or fruity odour to her breath. Treatment is to rehydrate the woman, giving adequate fluid and carbohydrate.
Ketonuria	The presence of ketone bodies in the urine.
Kyphosis	Abnormally increased convexity in the curvature of the thoracic spine as viewed from the side.
L	
Laparotomy	Incision through the uterine wall to enter the peritoneal cavity.
Lateral	To the side.
Leukopenia	An abnormal decrease in the number of white blood cells which are the cells in the blood which fight infection.
Liquor	Another word for amniotic fluid.
Lithotomy poles	Special poles attached to either side of a delivery bed or theatre table. They have slings which are used to support the woman's legs during certain procedures which are carried out in the genital area, e.g. vacuum extraction, perineal suturing.
Lithotomy position	The woman lies down on her back with legs wide apart and supported by the slings which hang on the lithotomy poles.
Lochia	The discharge from the uterus after childbirth. It consists of blood, mucus, shreds of decidua and other debris from the uterus. During the first 2–3 days it consists mainly of blood, then changes to a pinky/brown colour and contains more serous fluid. Finally it changes to a whitish colour and consists mainly of white blood cells and mucus. The lochia lasts for 2–3 weeks after the birth. Persistent red, profuse lochia may be associated with retained products of conception. Foul-smelling lochia is a sign of infection.
Loin	The part of the back between the thorax and the pelvis.
Lumbar puncture	The procedure whereby a hollow needle is inserted into the subarachnoid space between the third and fourth lumbar vertebrae to obtain a specimen of cerebrospinal fluid for examination, and to measure the pressure within the fluid. It may also be carried out for spinal anaesthesia.

M

Malar bones	The cheek bones.
Malnutrition	Inadequate nourishment resulting from a poor diet or from a defect in metabolism that prevents the body from using its food properly. The symptoms of malnutrition are physical weakness, lethargy and a sense of detachment from reality. In starvation there may be oedema, abdominal distension and excessive loss of weight. In addition there are signs of multiple vitamin deficiency.
Marginal	Borderline.
Mastitis	Infection of the breast. A wedge-shaped area of the breast becomes tender, red and hot and the woman feels generally unwell. The infection responds well to treatment with antibiotics. If untreated, it may lead to breast abscess.
Mastoiditis	Infection of the bone behind the ear. This can be a complication of otitis media (middle ear infection).
Meconium	A dark green material present in the intestines of the full-term fetus. It consists of bile-pigments and salts, mucus, epithelial cells and often some amniotic fluid. It is the first stool passed by the baby and continues for a day or two. Occasionally it is passed in utero when it may be a sign of fetal distress.
Median	Situated in the midline of a body or structure.
Median cubital vein	The vein situated in the midline of the cubital fossa.
Medical audit	Official examination of medical records.
Meningitis	Infection of the membranes enveloping the brain.
Mental retardation	Delayed mental development.
Mento vertical diameter	The distance between the chin and the vertex (highest point) of the head.
Mid-biceps	Halfway down the biceps (the muscle on the inside of the upper arm).
Monoplegia	Paralysis of one limb (arm or leg).
Moulding (of the fetal head)	Overlapping of fetal skull bones at the sutures and fontanelles to allow the bones to adapt to the pelvis through which it is passing. The presenting diameter is decreased and the diameter at right angles increased. If moulding is excessive (e.g. in obstructed labour), in the wrong direction, as occurs in malpositions and malpresentations, or occurs too quickly, there is a danger of intracranial haemorrhage.
Multipara	A woman who has borne more than one viable child.
Multiple pregnancy	A pregnancy of more than one fetus, such as in the case of twins or greater multiples.

Myometrium The muscle layer of the uterus.

N

Nape The back of the neck.

Necrosis Death of tissues.

Normal saline A solution of 0.9% sodium chloride (salt) that may be given in an intravenous infusion.

Nullipara A woman who has never borne a viable child.

O

Obesity Excessive fat throughout the body. Weight gain increases beyond that which is considered desirable with regard to age, height and bone structure. In pregnancy the obese woman is at greater risk of complications such as hypertension.

Oblique Slanting, inclined, diagonal.

Obstructed labour A labour in which progress is arrested by mechanical factors and delivery is impossible without operative intervention.

Occipito frontal diameter The distance between the bridge of the nose and the occipital protuberance (i.e. the prominence which can be felt on the occipital bone at the back of the head). It is the presenting diameter when the head is deflexed and measures 11.5 cm.

Occiput The area of the head which lies below the posterior fontanelle to the junction with the neck.

Oedema An excess of fluid in the tissues of the body. It causes excessive weight gain and swelling which pits on pressure. In pregnancy it is a common feature affecting the feet and ankles, but may also affect the hands, face and become generalized. It is no longer considered a significant sign of pre-eclampsia because some oedema is a common feature in so many pregnancies.

Offensive Smelling very bad.

Oliguria Diminished secretion of urine. It may be associated with impaired renal function following severe complications such as haemorrhage, pre-eclampsia and eclampsia and septic shock.

Os An opening
A bone.

Osteomalacia Adult rickets. It is caused by a gross deficiency of vitamin D which results in painful softening of the bones.

Otitis media Infection of the middle ear. Usually happens as a complication of an upper respiratory tract infection. Symptoms include pain in the ear and fever.

Oxygen	A colourless, odourless gas which is essential for life. It constitutes 21% of the atmosphere and is drawn into the lungs during the process of breathing. It then circulates in the blood to oxygenate all the tissues of the body. Lack of oxygen, (hypoxia) causes cyanosis , when the skin and mucous membranes have a bluish colour. Anoxia (no oxygen) causes death and is a common cause of perinatal death.
Oxytocic	Term applied to any drug which stimulates contractions of the uterus in order to induce or accelerate labour, or to prevent or treat postpartum haemorrhage.
P	
Parametritis	Infection of the parametrium.
Parametrium	Connective tissue around the lower part of the uterus. It fills in the spaces between the uterus and related organs.
Parity	The number of viable children a woman has borne.
Partograph	A record of all of the clinical observations made on a woman in labour, the central feature of which is the graphic recording of the dilatation of the cervix, as assessed by vaginal examination, and descent of the head. It includes an alert and action line which, if crossed when recording cervical dilatation, indicates that labour is progressing more slowly than normal and intervention is required.
Patella	The bone situated at the front of the knee, forming the kneecap.
Pathogenic	An agent or microorganism which causes disease, e.g. pathogenic bacteria.
Pelvic brim (or inlet)	The pelvic brim is the first part of the true pelvis to be negotiated by the fetus. As a general rule, if the fetal head can enter the pelvic brim, it should be able to pass through the rest of the pelvis.
Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)	An infection of the reproductive organs (uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries, parametrium). The infection may follow delivery or abortion, or it may be secondary to other infections of the genital tract or abdomen, or be a blood borne infection, e.g. tuberculosis. Symptoms include lower abdominal pain, fever, and vaginal discharge. Unless treated early and effectively with antibiotics, the fallopian tubes may be blocked and lead to secondary infertility. The condition may also become chronic.
Pelvic outlet	The diamond-shaped bony outlet of the pelvis through which the fetus passes at birth.
Pericarditis	Inflammation of the sac (pericardium) which surrounds the heart.
Perimetrium	The outermost layer of the uterus. It is draped over the uterus like a sheet and extends to the side walls of the pelvis forming the broad ligaments.
Perinatal	Around the time of birth.

Perineum	The area extending from the pubic arch to the coccyx, with underlying tissues. In obstetrics the perineal body is the fibromuscular pyramid between the lower third of the vagina anteriorly and the ischial spines laterally. In the second stage it thins and stretches during the birth of the baby and, in some cases, is torn.
Peritoneal cavity	The space containing the internal organs of the abdomen.
Peritoneum	Membrane covering the internal organs of the abdomen and lining the abdominal and pelvic cavity.
Peritoneum, parietal	Peritoneum lining the abdominal and pelvic cavity.
Peritoneum, visceral	Peritoneum that covers the abdominal organs, holding them into position.
Peritonitis	Infection of the peritoneum.
Persistent occiput posterior	The fetus has its occiput (i.e. back of head) directed towards the back of the maternal pelvis. Usually the head flexes and rotates to an anterior position, but a persistent occipito-posterior position fails to rotate and the baby is delivered face to pubes. Labour is often more difficult in these cases because wider diameters of the fetal head have to pass through the pelvis, contractions may be less effective, cervical dilatation slower, descent of the fetus delayed and injuries to mother and child are more common.
Photophobia	When light hurts the eyes.
Physical disability	A physical defect which may limit the individual's capacity to participate fully in normal life.
Pivot	To turn or swivel on a central point.
Placenta praevia	An abnormally situated placenta in the lower segment of the uterus which completely or partly covers the os (the opening between the uterus and the cervix). The stretching of the lower segment of the uterus during the last trimester of pregnancy causes some placental separation from the uterine wall. As a result episodes of vaginal bleeding occur which are typically painless. The danger is that the woman will have a catastrophic haemorrhage during late pregnancy.
Placental abruption	Premature separation of a normally-situated placenta, that is a placenta in the upper segment of the uterus, which occurs after the 22nd week. In this case there may be abdominal pain as well as bleeding. If the bleeding is concealed, i.e. collects behind the placenta, the abdomen will feel hard and be very painful. Shock may be severe and fetal distress is common.
Pleurisy	Infection of the membrane covering the lungs and lining the walls of the chest.
Polyhydramnios	A condition characterized by an excess of amniotic fluid. It is associated mainly with multiple pregnancy, fetal abnormality, diabetes and hydrops fetalis, a rare condition caused by severe haemolytic disease.

Polyuria	Excessive urination.
Posterior	Situated at the back of, or in the back part of, a structure.
Postpartum	After labour.
Postpartum haemorrhage	Blood loss of 500 ml or more from the genital tract after delivery. The commonest cause is atony (poor muscle tone) of the uterus, or it may be caused by trauma to the genital tract, e.g. tears of the vagina, cervix, or lower segment of the uterus. Postpartum haemorrhage is the commonest cause of maternal death.
Potency	The power of a medicinal agent to produce its desired effect.
Pouch of Douglas	The pocket like space between the rectum and the uterus.
Pre-eclampsia	A condition specific to pregnancy, arising after the 20th week of gestation, characterized by hypertension and proteinuria. Oedema may also be present, but is no longer considered a cardinal sign because it is present to some extent in most pregnancies. If not controlled, pre-eclampsia will lead to eclampsia which is characterized by fits, followed by coma, and has a high mortality rate.
Pre-term baby	A baby who is born before the 37th completed week of pregnancy.
Precipitate labour	Labour which progresses unusually quickly.
Primary postpartum haemorrhage	Excessive bleeding from the genital tract in the first 24 hours after delivery. The amount of blood is 500 ml or more.
Primigravida	A woman pregnant for the first time.
Primipara	A woman who has borne one viable child.
Prolonged labour	Labour which exceeds 12 hours.
Prolonged rupture of membranes	Ruptured membranes for more than 18 hours, regardless of whether labour has started or not.
Prophylactic	An agent which is used to try and prevent disease.
Prophylactic antibiotic treatment	Giving antibiotics to prevent infection.
Proteinuria	Presence of protein in the urine. Causes are contamination by vaginal discharge, infection or pre-eclampsia. It should always be investigated because, if due to pre-eclampsia, it is a serious sign. If caused by infection, treatment with antibiotics is required.
Pubic arch	The curved bowl-like bony structure which lies at the front of the pelvis.
Puerperal sepsis	An infection of the genital tract at any time between the onset of rupture of membranes or labour and the 42nd day following delivery or abortion.

Puerperium	The 42–day period following delivery of the baby. Another word meaning the same is “postpartum period”.
Pulmonary embolism	The blood circulation in the lungs is blocked by an embolus (blood clot).
Pulmonary oedema	Accumulation of fluid in the lungs.
Purpura	Small haemorrhage in the skin.
Pyelonephritis	Infection of the kidneys due to bacteria that have come up from the bladder after entering through the urethra.

R

Rales	A rattling sound heard when listening to lungs that are diseased.
Recumbent position	Lying down.
Resistant bacteria	Bacteria which are not killed by a drug that usually kills that kind of bacteria.
Resuscitation	Bringing back to life or consciousness a person who is apparently dead.
Retained placenta	Describes the situation when the placenta has not been delivered within 30 minutes after the birth of the baby.
Retracted	Drawn back.
Retroplacental	Behind or underneath the placenta.
Reversal	A turn or change in the opposite direction.
Rhesus factor	An antigen present on the red blood cells of most people. Those having this antigen are classified “rhesus positive”. Those that do not have it are “rhesus negative”. Rhesus incompatibility occurs when the mother is “rhesus negative” and the fetus is “rhesus positive”.
Rickets	Softening of bones due to vitamin D deficiency during childhood.
Risk factor	Factors which make a condition more likely to happen or more dangerous.
Rotation (of fetal head)	The movement of the fetal head as it descends through the birth canal.
Rupture	Tearing or bursting of a structure, e.g. rupture of uterus following obstructed labour.
Ruptured uterus	Tearing or bursting of the uterus due to obstructed labour.

S

Sacral promontory	The part of the first sacral vertebra which projects into the pelvic inlet.
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Sacrum	The lowest part of the spine. It is formed by five sacral vertebrae.
Sagittal suture	The membranous line between fetal skull bones (parietal bones) running from the posterior fontanelle to the anterior fontanelle.
Sanitation	The establishment of conditions favourable to health. It includes the safe disposal of faeces by the use of adequate latrines, to avoid the transmission of diseases.
Scoliosis	A lateral deviation in the normally straight vertical line of the spine.
Secondary postpartum haemorrhage	Includes all cases of PPH occurring between 24 hours after delivery of the baby and 6 weeks postpartum.
Segment	A section or a part of something.
Self-retaining catheter	A catheter that is left <i>in situ</i> in the bladder.
Semiprone position	Lying down on the left side.
Semi-recumbent position	Lying down with head and shoulders raised up.
Septic shock	A very serious infection of the blood stream causing high fever, low blood pressure, fast pulse and fast breathing. Untreated septic shock leads to coma and death.
Septicaemia	The presence and multiplication in the blood of harmful microorganisms in the blood, causing high fever and chills. Untreated, septicaemia can lead to shock and death.
Shock	A life-threatening condition characterized by failure of the circulatory system to maintain normal blood flow to vital organs (e.g. kidneys, heart brain). <i>Haemorrhagic shock</i> is shock due to low blood volume resulting from excessive blood loss. <i>Septic shock</i> is shock due to overwhelming infection and results from the action of the pathogenic bacteria on the vascular system.
Sinciput	The brow, or forehead.
Sinusitis	Infection in the sinuses (air cavities in the cranial bones on either side of the nose and above the eyes).
Sitz bath	Soaking of the genital area in a tub of clean warm water. This may be done in the postpartum to soothe pain from an episiotomy or perineal tear.
Smear	A specimen of superficial cells, e.g. from the cervix or vagina, which can be examined microscopically and gives information about the level of hormones or early malignant disease.
Sodium lactate	A solution of sodium lactate, sodium chloride, potassium chloride and calcium chloride which can be given via an intravenous infusion.
Sonar	A term for ultrasound in medical diagnosis.

Spasms	Sudden, strong, involuntary muscular contractions.
Specific gravity	Relative weight of any kind of matter (e.g. urine), expressed by the ratio of the weight of a certain volume of that matter to the weight of the same volume of water. The specific gravity of water is 1.
Specimen	A sample or part of a thing taken to determine the character of the whole e.g. specimen of urine.
Splint	A strip of rigid material such as wood, used to keep in place a movable body part.
Sputum	Matter ejected from the lungs, bronchi and trachea, through the mouth.
Stasis (of urine)	Standing still, not flowing properly.
Stat	A medical abbreviation meaning “at once”.
Statistics	A collection of numerical facts.
Status	Social position, relative importance of a person.
Stenosis (of vagina)	Narrowing of the vagina which is usually due to scarring caused by genital mutilation or unrepaired lacerations.
Stillbirth	A baby that is delivered dead (after the 22nd week of pregnancy).
Stillborn	A baby that is delivered dead.
Stunted growth	When a person is short, often because of insufficient food intake during childhood.
Subarachnoid haemorrhage	Bleeding within the membranes enveloping the brain due to a ruptured blood vessel.
Subinvolution (uterus)	The uterus is not reducing in size normally, (i.e. is slow to involute) during the early postpartum period.
Suboccipitobregmatic diameter (of head)	The distance from beneath the occiput to the anterior fontanelle.
Symphysiotomy	A surgical incision of the symphysis pubis to widen the pelvic outlet when there is cephalopelvic disproportion. It is an alternative emergency procedure when facilities for safe caesarean section are not available.
Symphysis pubis	The cartilaginous area where the two pubic bones join at the front of the pelvis
T	
Talipes	Clubfoot. A congenital abnormality when the foot has developed at an abnormal angle to the leg.
Tenderness	Painful when palpated.
Term baby	Baby born between 37 and 42 completed weeks of pregnancy.

Testicles/testes	The two glands in the scrotum which produce spermatozoa and male sex hormones.
Tetanus	A disease caused by microorganisms found in the soil and dust which is spread by animal and human faeces. The micro-organisms enter the body through a break in the skin and cause a severe condition with muscle spasm and convulsions leading to death. Because stiffness of the jaw is often the first symptom, it is also known as lockjaw. This severe disease can be prevented by adequate immunization with tetanus toxoid.
Thorax	The chest.
Thrombophlebitis	Inflammation of a superficial vein together with clot formation. In these cases the clot rarely separates from the wall of the vein and so the risk of embolism is small.
Thrombosis	The formation of a blood clot. This occurs in the deep veins and if the clot becomes detached from the vessel wall, there is a serious risk of embolism leading to death.
Tocolytic agent	An agent that stops uterine contractions, e.g. ritodrine hydrochloride, salbutamol.
Traditional birth attendant (TBA)	Name given to a person who traditionally assists women in childbirth at community level. Most are illiterate and become birth attendants without training, but efforts are now being made to give them basic training for a few weeks, and to encourage them to use basic but essential birthing kits. They are not considered as a “skilled birth attendant” but do have an important role to play in the community - to be linked to skilled birth attendants.
Transient	Temporary, not lasting a long time.
Trauma	Injury.
Traumatic bleeding	In obstetrics, occurs as a result of injury to the genital tract.
Tumour	A new growth of tissue which could be benign (harmless) or cancerous.
Twitch	Sudden, small, involuntary contractions.
U	
Ultrasound	Sound at frequencies above the upper limit of normal hearing which is used in obstetrics (and other branches of medicine) in the technique of ultrasonography. It is used to assess the maturity and size of the fetus, locate the site of the placenta, diagnose fetal abnormalities and pelvic tumours.
Umbilical cord	The cord which connects the fetus to its placenta. Nourishment and oxygen pass along the umbilical vein from the placenta to the fetus. Waste products pass from the fetus to the placenta via two umbilical arteries.

Uraemia	An excess of urea in the blood. It is one of the signs of chronic kidney failure.
Utero vesical pouch	The pocket-like space between the uterus and the bladder.
Uterus inversion	The uterus is turned inside out, with the fundus of the uterus being forced through the cervix and protruding into or right outside of the vagina. It is a serious obstetric emergency which leads to severe shock. The uterus must be replaced as quickly as possible.
V	
Vacuum extraction	A procedure in which a metal or plastic cup is attached to the baby's head by creating a vacuum. By gently pulling on the chain leading to the cup during contractions, the baby's head gradually descends through the birth canal. It is important to check that there is no cephalo-pelvic disproportion before attempting a vacuum delivery.
Vaginal fornix	The space formed between the vaginal wall and the part of the cervix which projects into the vagina. There are four fornices, the anterior, posterior and two lateral fornices.
Varicose veins	Veins that are abnormally tortuous and distended. If painful during pregnancy, the woman should be advised to wear support stockings which should be applied before the woman rises to her feet in the morning, and to rest with her legs elevated above the level of the heart.
Venepuncture	The puncture of a vein to get a blood sample or to set up an intravenous infusion.
Vertex	The area of the head between the anterior and posterior fontanelles and the two parietal eminences (i.e. bumps on each side top of the head. In normal labour when the head is well-flexed, the vertex presents.
Virus	Small infective agent which grows and reproduces in living cells. Viruses may cross the placenta in pregnancy and cause fetal abnormalities, especially in the first trimester.
Vitamins	Essential food substances. Vitamins A, all of the B's, C, D, E and K are essential to nutrition and health and deficiencies cause a variety of health problems.
W	
Waddling gait	Walking with an exaggerated elevation of the hips (rather like a duck walks).
Water intoxication	The condition caused by excess fluid in the circulation and insufficient sodium. It may be caused by over-transfusion and can lead to nausea, vomiting and, in severe cases, convulsions, coma and death.