

40 Weeks (2014) [1]

By: Pollesche, Jessica Keywords: [Genetic Screening](#) [2] [Genetic testing](#) [3] [Gestation](#) [4] [Gestational Age](#) [5]

In 2014, Big Belli, a media and social networking brand, released a documentary called *40 Weeks* online. The documentary, directed by Christopher Henze, follows multiple women during their pregnancies. The film predominantly features three women, though it includes the stories of many. Throughout the film, women detail their accounts of physical and emotional changes that occurred during their pregnancies. *40 Weeks* provides viewers with information about different aspects of [pregnancy](#) [6] including the importance of nutrition and hydration, knowledge about safe medications, and the possible complications that can affect a pregnant woman and her [fetus](#) [7].

The film is divided into three sections corresponding to the three defined trimesters of [pregnancy](#) [6]. The first [trimester](#) [8] of [pregnancy](#) [6] is from week one to week twelve. The second [trimester](#) [8] is from week thirteen to week twenty-seven. The third [trimester](#) [8] spans from week twenty-eight to childbirth, which typically occurs around week forty. An infant delivered at forty weeks is considered full-term, while an infant delivered prior to thirty-seven weeks is considered premature.

Throughout those three sections, the film includes interviews with pregnant women. Although the film follows the stories of multiple women, it predominantly features the stories of three women: Emily, Victoria, and Liz. The opening of the documentary describes how doctors measure [pregnancy](#) [6], what physiological changes occur in the first [trimester](#) [8], and introduces the pregnant women featured in the film. The second section of the documentary discusses the second [trimester](#) [8]. At the end of the documentary, the pregnant women experience the third [trimester](#) [8] of [pregnancy](#) [6], prepare for the birthing process, and give birth to their infants.

The opening of *40 Weeks* states that doctors measure [pregnancy](#) [6] using the first day of the woman's last menstrual cycle as the first day of her [pregnancy](#) [6]. A woman's menstrual cycle is the process of [ovulation](#) [9] and [menstruation](#) [10] that enables a woman's body to get pregnant. The cycle repeats every month until an [egg](#) [11] is fertilized by [sperm](#) [12] and the woman becomes pregnant. Following the explanation of how doctors calculate [pregnancy](#) [6], the documentary discusses the first three weeks of [pregnancy](#) [6]. Though the documentary does not discuss week one in detail, it does discuss the second week of [pregnancy](#) [6]. During the second week of [pregnancy](#) [6], the woman's body undergoes a process called [ovulation](#) [9], when the woman's ovaries release eggs. The film explains that a male [sperm](#) [12] usually fertilizes a woman's [egg](#) [11] during the third week of [pregnancy](#) [6].

The film then introduces several other pregnant women as they describe their experiences having an [ultrasound](#) [13] in the first [trimester](#) [8] of [pregnancy](#) [6]. An [ultrasound](#) [13] is an imaging technique that uses sound waves to produce images of [afetus](#) [7]. An image produced during an [ultrasound](#) [13] is called a sonogram. One woman, Victoria, describes the experience of having an [ultrasound](#) [13] during the first [trimester](#) [8]. During Victoria's [ultrasound](#) [13], physicians diagnosed her with a fibroid tumor, an abnormal noncancerous growth that can develop on or in a woman's [uterus](#) [14]. According to *40 Weeks*, a fibroid tumor is common in pregnant women and the tumor had no effect on Victoria's [fetus](#) [7].

The film then introduces a pregnant woman named Liz and her husband, Max. Liz and her husband describe how [pregnancy](#) [6] seemed impossible due to their specific circumstances. The couple describes that Liz suffered from sarcoma, a form of cancer, and was treated with chemotherapy. Due to that chemotherapy, Liz began premature menopause, or the discontinuation of a woman's monthly menstrual cycle. Physicians informed Liz that she may remain in menopause permanently, causing her to be infertile. According to Liz and Max, the couple still managed to conceive several months after Liz ended chemotherapy.

As the film continues discussing the first [trimester](#) [8] of [pregnancy](#) [6], Tiffany Werbin-Silver, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Westchester Health Associates in Mount Kisco, New York, describes certain foods to avoid during [pregnancy](#) [6]. In the film, Werbin-Silver states that pregnant women should avoid raw, undercooked, and unpasteurized foods. Pasteurization is a process that kills bacteria, so unpasteurized foods might contain bacteria that could harm the pregnant woman and her [fetus](#) [7]. In addition to food guidelines, the film notes the importance of oral health care in pregnant women. According to Susan Peck, a nurse practitioner, up to fifty percent of women develop gingivitis, or gum inflammation, during [pregnancy](#) [6], caused by the hormonal changes that occur during [pregnancy](#) [6].

In addition, Peck describes safe medications that can be used during [pregnancy](#) [6]. In the US, the [Food and Drug Administration](#) [15], or FDA, labels drugs with categories that indicate how safe they are to use during [pregnancy](#) [6]. Those labeled category A are the safest drugs to take during [pregnancy](#) [6], while category B drugs are classified as having demonstrated no risks in [humans](#) [16].

Continuing the discussion of the first [trimester](#) [8] of [pregnancy](#) [6], Peck explains the importance for pregnant women to stay

hydrated and eat nutritious foods. By keeping hydrated during [pregnancy](#)^[6], especially through the first [trimester](#)^[8], women can help prevent fatigue associated with [pregnancy](#)^[6]. In addition to remaining hydrated, Peck states that pregnant women should focus on eating nutritional carbohydrates, proteins, and fats in their meals. Peck recommends eating foods such as spinach, salmon, Greek yogurt, and eggs. Peck suggests that women avoid types of large [fish](#)^[17] such as sharks, swordfish, and king mackerel, because they contain high amounts of mercury that can be harmful to the developing [fetus](#)^[7]. According to Peck, prenatal vitamins are also important to fill nutritional gaps in the pregnant woman's diet.

Next, the film describes fetal genetic testing during the first [trimester](#)^[8]. According to Jacques Moritz, director of gynecology at Mount Sinai Roosevelt, a hospital, in New York, New York, the genetic tests a woman and [fetus](#)^[7] receive can depend on the woman's age. As he describes during his interview in the film, a pregnant woman below the age of thirty-five is considered at low risk for complications, while a pregnant woman over the age of thirty-five is considered at high risk. Most women undergo a test called a nuchal translucency, or NT, which measures the skin at the back of the fetus's neck. Cases of thickened skin can be associated with [Down syndrome](#)^[18] and heart defects. [Down syndrome](#)^[18] is the result of extra genetic material on the twenty-first chromosome that can cause intellectual and developmental disabilities. The first [trimester](#)^[8] ends at twelve weeks, which the film notes before continuing on to the second [trimester](#)^[8].

In the film, at week thirteen, physicians inform Liz that her cancer has returned and she will need to undergo surgery to remove a cancerous tumor from her back. Liz undergoes surgery and the documentary continues to follow her [pregnancy](#)^[6]. As the film progresses, several of the pregnant women note they can feel their [fetus](#)^[7] begin to move at week seventeen. Peck discusses the adaptability of women's bodies during [pregnancy](#)^[6] and states that while the [fetus](#)^[7] is developing teeth and bones, the woman's bones will receive less calcium.

Proceeding with the second [trimester](#)^[8], the women presented in the film reach week twenty of [pregnancy](#)^[6]. Several of the women presented in the documentary undergo an anatomy scan and an [ultrasound](#)^[13] at twenty-seven weeks. During an anatomy scan, physicians check the fetus's heart rate, position inside the [womb](#)^[19], and amniotic fluid levels. Amniotic fluid is the fluid that protects and insulates a developing [fetus](#)^[7] inside the woman's [womb](#)^[19]. During the [ultrasound](#)^[13], physicians look at brain and heart function, the sex of the infant, and assess the [fetus](#)^[7] for any [birth defects](#)^[20].

As detailed in the film, pregnant women also undergo a glucose-tolerance test during the second [trimester](#)^[8], typically between twenty-four and twenty-eight weeks of [pregnancy](#)^[6]. A medical professional administers the test to determine whether the pregnant woman has developed gestational diabetes. Gestational diabetes, a common [pregnancy](#)^[6]-related complication, is caused by hormonal changes during [pregnancy](#)^[6] that affect how the human body uses insulin and sugar. Insulin is a protein [hormone](#)^[21] created by the liver that regulates blood glucose levels throughout the body. Associated risks of gestational diabetes include excessive weight gain in the [fetus](#)^[7] and increased risk of having to deliver via cesarean section. As part of the glucose-tolerance test, the pregnant woman is assigned to drink a liquid that contains fifty grams of glucose within five minutes. After the woman has consumed the solution, a blood sample is taken by a medical professional to test the blood sugar level, or the amount of glucose present in the blood. In addition to gestational diabetes, the film describes another common condition in [pregnancy](#)^[6], pre-eclampsia, which is often diagnosed later in [pregnancy](#)^[6]. Pre-eclampsia is the onset of high blood pressure during [pregnancy](#)^[6], and that can cause seizures in pregnant women. The second [trimester](#)^[8] ends at twenty-seven weeks.

Following the second [trimester](#)^[8], the documentary proceeds to the third [trimester](#)^[8] of [pregnancy](#)^[6], week twenty-eight to childbirth. During the third [trimester](#)^[8], the pregnant women in the film have baby showers and begin getting ready to give birth. Following the baby showers, several of the women begin to set up their nurseries. At week thirty-two, physicians inform Victoria that she is no longer able to deliver vaginally and will have to deliver her [fetus](#)^[7] via cesarean section. The fibroid tumor that Victoria was diagnosed with at the beginning of the documentary is blocking her [cervix](#)^[22], the ring of the tissue at the bottom of the [womb](#)^[19] that widens to let the [fetus](#)^[7] exit, and the [fetus](#)^[7] will be unable to push through the large tumor.

As *40 Weeks* concludes, physicians inform Liz in week thirty-three of [pregnancy](#)^[6] that her cancer has returned. The physicians decide to induce Liz's labor at thirty-five weeks so that she can receive chemotherapy to treat the cancer. Meanwhile, the other women featured in the documentary give birth between week thirty-four and week forty-one. After the women give birth, the film introduces each infant with a caption. The caption includes the infant's name, weight, and date of delivery. The caption also states whether the infant was delivered vaginally or via cesarean section, and if a midwife or doula was present. Midwives and doulas are trained professionals that assist women during [pregnancy](#)^[6] and childbirth. A doula may also provide support to the woman after the infant is born.

Sources

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