

Alpha fetoprotein AFP

AFP is a protein normally produced by the liver of a developing baby during pregnancy. AFP is the main fetal glycoprotein. AFP levels decrease soon after birth.

Why the AFP Test is Performed?

- Screen for problems in the baby during pregnancy
- Diagnose certain liver disorders
- Screen for and monitor some cancers

How the Test is Performed and How to Prepare for the Test?

For the test a blood sample is needed without any special preparation.

What Abnormal Results Mean

Higher-than-normal level may be due to:

- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Cancer of ovaries
- Cancer of testes
- Malignant teratoma
- Cancer of liver
- Cancer of biliary tract
- Cancer of pancreas

During pregnancy AFP increases by gestational age. The most common cause of elevated AFP is dating error. During AFP elevation, the next step is to confirm gestational age.

Higher-than-normal AFP level may be due to:

- Multiple pregnancy
- Anencephaly
- Duodenal atresia
- Spina bifida
- Omphalocele

Lower-than-normal levels may be due to:

The most common cause of low AFP is dating error. During low AFP next step is to confirm gestational age.

Lower-than-normal levels of AFP may be due to:

- Intrauterine death
- Down syndrome
- Miscarriage

Alternative Names

Fetal alpha globulin.

Useful Information

It is important to note that in pregnant women AFP is a screening test, not a diagnostic one. So, in case of abnormal results further testing is needed.