**Seven ways to support healthy blood pressure during pregnancy**

Pregnant or planning a pregnancy? It’s time to think about your blood pressure, even if you’ve never had high blood pressure. About half of pregnancy complications, such as having a preterm baby, are related to [high blood pressure](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/high-blood-pressure). Pregnancy complications also increase your risk of heart disease later in life. But many pregnancy complications can be prevented.

You may begin your pregnancy with a healthy blood pressure of less than 120/80 mm Hg, but still develop a type of high blood pressure that occurs during or right after pregnancy. One complication is gestational hypertension, defined as blood pressure 140/90 mm Hg or greater. It typically occurs after 20 weeks of pregnancy or close to delivery.

Another condition is preeclampsia, a combination of high blood pressure that develops after 20 weeks of pregnancy with other signs your organs aren’t working well, such as high protein levels in your urine. Serious cases can lead to life-threatening seizures or coma, a condition known as eclampsia.

Here are seven ways to help keep you and your baby safe from problems related to high blood pressure.

**1**. **Talk to your healthcare provider.**

Even if you’re not yet pregnant, knowing if you have high blood pressure can help determine if you’re at higher risk for pregnancy-related complications. Work with your provider to make a plan for a healthy pregnancy. This includes discussing:

* What a healthy blood pressure range is for you.
* How to control or lower high blood pressure by adopting a healthy lifestyle, such as being physically active, choosing heart-healthy foods that are low in salt and sodium, and not smoking.
* Medications you are taking. If you’re already on blood pressure medicine, ask if the type you take is okay to use when pregnant.
* Your family’s health history. If others in your family had preeclampsia, your provider may recommend taking extra precautions.
* How other individual factors, such as your age, where you live, your race, or access to healthcare may affect your risk for pregnancy-related complications.

**2**. **Monitor your blood pressure.**

Usually, you can’t feel if you have high blood pressure. As part of your regular prenatal care, your provider will check your blood pressure at each visit. If it’s high, they may suggest you get a home monitor. If you need one, ask someone at your provider’s office to help make sure it’s working properly and that you’re using it correctly. Then keep track of your numbers. Also, ask your healthcare provider when you should call if your numbers go up.

**3**. **Know the signs of preeclampsia**.

Preeclampsia may not cause symptoms at first. However, you may notice some mild symptoms, such as:

* Swelling in your hands or face
* Gaining weight suddenly over 1 to 2 days
* Gaining more than 2 pounds a week
* Peeing less often than normal

Preeclampsia generally occurs after the 20th week of pregnancy. It can also develop after delivery, most often within 48 hours. If you have any symptoms or something doesn’t feel right, it’s always best to call your provider. Go to the emergency department or call 9-1-1 if you experience any of these symptoms of severe preeclampsia:

* Headache that doesn’t go away or becomes worse
* Trouble breathing
* Pain on the right side, below the ribs, or in the right shoulder
* Nausea and vomiting
* Vision changes

**4. Get support from friends and family.**

Share signs of pregnancy complications with your family and friends. Ask them to help you monitor how you’re feeling and help you get medical care. When you’re talking to a health provider, these friends can make sure you describe all of your symptoms and ask all of your questions, and they can advocate for you so you get the care you need.

**5**. **Try to manage stress.**

Stress isn’t good for your blood pressure. Practice turning on your body’s built-in relaxation response (the opposite of the stress response). Guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, and deep breathing exercises are techniques that can help you relax. Moving more can help calm your mind and body, and is important for your overall heart health. Try yoga or meet up with friends for a brisk walk. Being in nature can also be very soothing for some people.

**6**. **Stay healthy post-pregnancy.**

After your pregnancy, try to keep up your self-care routines, especially for your heart health. If you had preeclampsia, you’ll need to take extra care of your heart. One of the best things you can do is share the details about pregnancy complications with your healthcare providers. Tell them what happened and what treatment you received. You may need a cardiovascular screening 3 months after pregnancy and then annually. The screening will measure your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and weight. Remember—you know your body. Identifying and modifying cardiovascular disease risks early can significantly reduce the risk for experiencing a heart attack or stroke later in life. Tell your healthcare provider if your blood pressure goes up or something doesn’t feel right.

**7. Learn more.**

Learn more about [heart health and pregnancy](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/heart-truth/listen-to-your-heart/heart-health-and-pregnancy) and find resources for tracking your blood pressure numbers at [nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/high-blood-pressure).

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute