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High Blood Pressure in Pregnancy

What is high blood pressure in pregnancy?

Blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. Your arteries are blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to other parts of your body. **High blood pressure** [<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressure.html>] , or **hypertension**, is blood pressure that is higher than normal. Having high blood pressure can put you at risk for other health problems, such as **heart disease** [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartdiseaseinwomen.html>] , **heart attack** [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartattack.html>] , and **stroke** [<https://medlineplus.gov/stroke.html>] .

During pregnancy, high blood pressure can cause problems for you and your baby. To keep you and your baby healthy, it's important to get treatment for high blood pressure before, during, and after pregnancy.

What are the types of high blood pressure in pregnancy?

There are different types of high blood pressure in pregnancy:

- **Gestational hypertension** is high blood pressure that you develop while you are pregnant. It starts after you are 20 weeks pregnant. You usually don't have any other symptoms. In many cases, it does not harm you or your baby, and it goes away within 12 weeks after childbirth. But it does raise your risk of high blood pressure in the future. If it becomes severe, it can lead to a **preterm birth** [<https://medlineplus.gov/preterm labor.html>] or your baby having a **low birth weight** [<https://medlineplus.gov/birthweight.html>] . Some women with gestational hypertension do go on to develop **preeclampsia**, a more serious type of high blood pressure in pregnancy.
- **Chronic hypertension** is high blood pressure that starts before the 20th week of pregnancy or before you became pregnant. Some people may have had it long before becoming pregnant but didn't know it until they got their blood pressure checked at their **prenatal visit** [<https://medlineplus.gov/prenatalcare.html>] . Sometimes chronic hypertension can also lead to **preeclampsia**.
- **Preeclampsia** is a sudden increase in blood pressure after the 20th week of pregnancy. It usually happens in the last trimester. Preeclampsia also often includes signs of damage to some of your organs, such as your liver or kidneys. The signs may include protein in the urine (pee) and very high blood pressure. Preeclampsia can be serious or even life-threatening for both you and your baby.
 - If preeclampsia becomes severe enough to affect your brain function and causes **seizures** [<https://medlineplus.gov/seizures.html>] or a **coma** [<https://medlineplus.gov/coma.html>] , it is called **eclampsia**.
 - In rare cases, preeclampsia symptoms may not start until after delivery. This is called **postpartum preeclampsia**. If this type of preeclampsia becomes more severe and causes a seizure, it is known as **postpartum eclampsia**.
 - When a person with preeclampsia or eclampsia has damage to the liver and blood cells, it's called **HELLP syndrome**. It is rare, but very serious.

Who is more likely to develop high blood pressure in pregnancy?

You are more likely to develop high blood pressure in pregnancy if you:

- Had chronic high blood pressure or chronic kidney disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/chronickidneydisease.html>] before pregnancy
- Had high blood pressure or preeclampsia in a previous pregnancy
- Have obesity [<https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>]

- Are under age 20 or over age 40
- Are pregnant with more than one baby [<https://medlineplus.gov/twinstripletsmultiplebirths.html>]
- Are African American
- Have a family history of high blood pressure in pregnancy
- Have certain health conditions, such as diabetes [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetesandpregnancy.html>] or lupus [<https://medlineplus.gov/lupus.html>]

What are the symptoms of high blood pressure in pregnancy?

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms. People usually find out they have high blood pressure when their health care provider measures their blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/measuring-blood-pressure/>] .

Preeclampsia can cause other symptoms, including:

- Too much protein in your urine (called proteinuria).
- Swelling (edema [<https://medlineplus.gov/edema.html>]) in your face and hands. Your feet may also swell, but many women have swollen feet during pregnancy. So swollen feet by themselves may not be a sign of a problem.
- A headache [<https://medlineplus.gov/headache.html>] that does not go away.
- Vision problems, including blurred vision or seeing spots.
- Pain in your upper right abdomen [<https://medlineplus.gov/abdominalpain.html>] (belly).
- Trouble breathing [<https://medlineplus.gov/breathingproblems.html>] .

Eclampsia can also cause seizures, nausea and/or vomiting [<https://medlineplus.gov/nauseaandvomiting.html>] , and low urine output.

If you go on to develop **HELLP syndrome**, you may also have bleeding [<https://medlineplus.gov/bleeding.html>] or bruising [<https://medlineplus.gov/bruises.html>] easily, extreme fatigue [<https://medlineplus.gov/fatigue.html>] , and liver failure.

What problems can high blood pressure in pregnancy cause?

High blood pressure in pregnancy can lead to complications such as:

- Placental abruption, where the placenta (the organ that brings oxygen and nutrients to the baby) separates from the uterus (the place where a baby grows during pregnancy)
- Poor fetal growth, caused by a lack of nutrients and oxygen
- Preterm birth
- Your baby having a low birth weight
- Damage to your kidneys, liver, brain, and other organ and blood systems
- A higher risk of heart disease for you

How is high blood pressure in pregnancy diagnosed?

Your provider will check your blood pressure and urine at each prenatal visit. If your blood pressure reading is high (140/90 or higher), especially after the 20th week of pregnancy, your provider will likely want to order some tests. These may include blood tests and other lab tests, such as a test to look for extra protein in your urine [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/protein-in-urine/>] .

What are the treatments for high blood pressure in pregnancy?

If you have high blood pressure, you and your baby will be closely monitored to lower the chance of complications. You may need to:

- Check your blood pressure at home.
- Keep track of how many times you feel the baby kicking each day.
- Adjust your physical activity. Talk to your provider about what level of physical activity is right for you.
- Take medicine to control your blood pressure. Talk to your provider about which medicines are safe for your baby.

- Take aspirin in the second trimester, if you are at risk of preeclampsia and your provider recommends aspirin.
- Visit your provider more often to monitor your condition and your baby's growth rate and heart rate.


If you have **eclampsia**, **HELLP syndrome**, or a severe case of **preeclampsia**, you will most likely need to go to the hospital. Treatment often includes medicines. Your provider may also recommend delivering the baby early. They will make the decision based on:

- How severe the condition is
- The possible risks to you and your baby
- How far along the pregnancy is


The goal is to lower the risks to you while giving your baby as much time as possible to mature before delivery.

The symptoms of **preeclampsia** can last after delivery, but they usually go away within 6 weeks.




Start Here

- **About Preeclampsia and Eclampsia** [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preeclampsia/conditioninfo>]  (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/preeclampsia/informacion>]
- **High Blood Pressure during Pregnancy** [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/high-blood-pressure-during-pregnancy/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/presion-arterial-alta-durante-el-embarazo-es/?adfree=true>]
- **High Blood Pressure during Pregnancy** [<https://www.cdc.gov/high-blood-pressure/about/high-blood-pressure-during-pregnancy.html>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)


Symptoms

- **What Are the Symptoms of Preeclampsia, Eclampsia, and HELLP Syndrome?** [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preeclampsia/conditioninfo/symptoms>]  (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/preeclampsia/informacion/sintomas>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- **How Do Health Care Providers Diagnose Preeclampsia, Eclampsia, and HELLP Syndrome?** [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preeclampsia/conditioninfo/diagnosed>]  (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/preeclampsia/informacion/diagnostica>]
- **Magnesium Blood Test** [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/magnesium-blood-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-magnesio-en-la-sangre/>]
- **Measuring Blood Pressure** [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/measuring-blood-pressure/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/medicion-de-la-presion-arterial/>]

Treatments and Therapies


- **What Are the Treatments for Preeclampsia, Eclampsia, and HELLP Syndrome?** [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preeclampsia/conditioninfo/treatments>]  (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/preeclampsia/informacion/tratamientos>]

Related Issues

- **HELLP Syndrome** [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/hellp-syndrome/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/sindrome-hellp/?adfree=true>]

Pregnancy and Your Heart Health [https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/THT-HBP-WomenPregnancyFactSheet_508.pdf]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - **PDF**


Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/es/resources/el-embarazo-y-la-salud-del-corazon-pregnancy-and-your-heart-health>]

- What Are the Risks of Preeclampsia and Eclampsia to the Fetus? [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preeclampsia/conditioninfo/risk-fetus>]  (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/preeclampsia/informacion/riesgos-feto>]


Specifics

- Postpartum Preeclampsia [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/postpartum-preeclampsia/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/preeclampsia-posparto-es/?adfree=true>]



Genetics

- Preeclampsia: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/preeclampsia>]  (National Library of Medicine)

Videos and Tutorials

- Preeclampsia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000102.htm>]  (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/anatomyvideos/000102.htm>]

Clinical Trials


- ClinicalTrials.gov: Hypertension, Pregnancy-Induced [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Hypertension,+Pregnancy-Induced%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Pre-Eclampsia [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Pre-Eclampsia%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Obstructive sleep apnea-associated hypertensive disorders in pregnancy: a literature review and... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40753390>]
- Article: Prevalence and associated factors of pregnancy induced hypertension among pregnant women... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40748988>]
- Article: Time Trends in the Disease Burden of Maternal Hypertensive Disorder in... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40738701>]
- High Blood Pressure in Pregnancy -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Hypertension%2C+Pregnancy-Induced%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- How to Find Find an Ob-Gyn [<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/find-an-ob-gyn>] (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>] 

Patient Handouts

- Eclampsia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000899.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000899.htm>]

- HELLP syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000890.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000890.htm>]
- Preeclampsia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000898.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000898.htm>]
- Preeclampsia - self-care [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000606.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000606.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Eclampsia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000899.htm>]

HELLP syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000890.htm>]

Preeclampsia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000102.htm>]

Preeclampsia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000898.htm>]

Preeclampsia - self-care [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000606.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Health Problems in Pregnancy [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthproblemsinpregnancy.html>]

How to Prevent High Blood Pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/howtopreventhighbloodpressure.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *High Blood Pressure in Pregnancy* is the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English

[<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/highbloodpressureinpregnancy.html>] on *High Blood Pressure in Pregnancy*

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

Allyson Felix Is a Champion for Maternal Health [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/allyson-felix-is-a-champion-for-maternal-health>]

Mother Spreads Awareness After Multiple Preeclampsia Diagnoses [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/mother-spreads-awareness-after-multiple-preeclampsia-diagnoses>]

Preeclampsia: What You Need to Know [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/preeclampsia-what-you-need-to-know>]

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