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ON THE WAY TO A SAFER PREGNANCY  
  
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I was excited to hear recently that scientists at King's College London have devised a new test that could accurately predict from early on in pregnancy which women will get **pre-eclampsia**.

This potentially fatal condition, which can lead to kidney or liver damage, blood clotting and seizures, is tricky to diagnose, so anything that can help is welcomed.

Every year seven to 10 UK women and 1,000 babies die as a result of the condition, which is also responsible for a quarter of all premature births.

We already know that anyone who's suffered before from **pre-eclampsia** or who has chronic high blood pressure, diabetes, a kidney disorder or migraine is at increased **risk**.

You're also more likely to get it if you're obese, older than 40 or younger than 18, or you suffer from certain conditions including Polycystic Ovary Syndrome or rheumatoid arthritis.

Don't worry if any of this applies, you can be carefully monitored throughout your pregnancy so early warning signs like high blood pressure and protein in the urine can be spotted and controlled.

But we also know that it affects one in 20 first pregnancies, including those in healthy women. And it's these women who are most difficult to **identify.**

Cue the new test. Scientists have devised a model that assesses a woman's personal **risk** according to certain factors.

For instance, women with coronary heart disease in the family seem to be at increased **risk** while women who eat plenty of fruit seem to have a reduced **risk.**

The findings need to be confirmed with more research but once this has been done doctors will be able to use a set formula to calculate a woman's personal **risk,** pinpointing exactly who should be monitored from the start before problems show.

This will hopefully save lives.

In the meantime, if you're pregnant, try to keep your high blood pressure down by eating plenty of fruit and veg and avoiding salt and alcohol.

Always keep antenatal appointments and be alert to the potential warning signs.

These include swelling of your feet, ankles, face and hands, severe headaches, blurred vision, stomach or shoulder pain, and nausea and vomiting later on in pregnancy.

If you're worried, tell your doctor or midwife or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

Doctors will try to control your symptoms with drugs until 36 weeks, when you can have a caesarean section to deliver the baby.