

American Heart Association.



Blood Pressure and Pregnancy

Having healthy blood pressure is vital before, during and after pregnancy. High blood pressure, also called hypertension, often has no symptoms, so regular medical checkups throughout pregnancy are essential.

Why Blood Pressure Matters

High blood pressure is potentially fatal in pregnancy and a major cause of problems such as preterm delivery and low birthweight. It also increases risks for heart disease and stroke during pregnancy and later.

Understanding Blood Pressure Readings

A blood pressure reading includes two numbers. **Systolic blood pressure**, first number, reflects the pressure blood exerts against artery walls when the heart beats. **Diastolic blood pressure**, second number, reflects the pressure against artery walls as the heart rests between beats.

A reading of less than **120/80 mm Hg** is considered normal.

120
80

Pregnancy-Related Blood Pressure Conditions

- **Chronic hypertension** is high blood pressure that started before the 20th week of pregnancy.
- **Gestational hypertension** usually develops after 20 weeks and often goes away after childbirth. But it may increase the future risk of hypertension.
- **Preeclampsia** is severe hypertension plus other associated symptoms such as protein in the urine that usually develops after 20 weeks, often in the third trimester. It can also develop in the weeks after childbirth and may increase the risk of future health problems, including heart disease and stroke.
- **Eclampsia** develops in some women with preeclampsia. This is a medical emergency that can cause seizures and coma.

What You Can Do

Regularly monitor your blood pressure.

This will be done during health care visits. Some women may also need to check their blood pressure at home.

Discuss all medications with your health care team. Some blood pressure drugs are safe during pregnancy. But ACE inhibitors and ARBs have been shown to be dangerous to mother and infant during pregnancy.

Know your risks. Risk factors for pregnancy-related hypertension include:

- ✓ Family history
- ✓ Being age 35 or older
- ✓ Obesity
- ✓ Preexisting medical conditions such as diabetes
- ✓ Health problems in previous pregnancies
- ✓ Structural racism and other inequities that affect health also increase risk of entering pregnancy with high blood pressure and experiencing severe complications because of it.

Stay healthy even after delivery.

High blood pressure may occur after a woman gives birth even if she didn't have it during her pregnancy.

Make heart-healthy changes

Learn about Life's Essential 8:

- ✓ Eat better
- ✓ Be more active
- ✓ Quit tobacco
- ✓ Get healthy sleep
- ✓ Manage weight
- ✓ Control cholesterol
- ✓ Manage blood sugar
- ✓ Manage blood pressure

