

# High Blood Pressure and Pregnancy: What it Means for You and Your Baby



## What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is also called hypertension. If you have high blood pressure, the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels is often too high. This may lead to health problems in the future. Controlling your blood pressure can help you and your baby stay healthy. Many people do not know they have high blood pressure because they may not have or notice any symptoms. This is why it is important to keep all your scheduled health care visits before and after your baby is born.

Your health care provider (HCP) may tell you that you have one of these three types of high blood pressure that can occur before, during, or after pregnancy: **chronic hypertension, gestational hypertension, or preeclampsia.**

Chronic Hypertension	Gestational Hypertension	Preeclampsia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present before you are pregnant or appears early in pregnancy (before 20 weeks)</li><li>• It does not go away after the baby is born</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First appears after 20 weeks of pregnancy</li><li>• Will usually go away after birth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Often appears after 20 weeks of pregnancy</li><li>• Can occur after birth (postpartum preeclampsia)</li><li>• Goes away 4-6 weeks after the baby is born</li></ul>

## Why is high blood pressure a concern?

While most pregnant people with high blood pressure have healthy babies, if not treated, high blood pressure can be dangerous for both parent and baby.

For You:	For Your Baby:
<p><b>High blood pressure can increase your chances of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Preeclampsia</li><li>• Seizures (eclampsia) later in pregnancy</li><li>• Heart and kidney diseases</li><li>• A stroke</li><li>• Having your baby early</li></ul>	<p><b>High blood pressure can increase the chances of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being born early, which can cause breathing problems and other concerns</li><li>• Being very small at birth</li></ul>

## What are the signs and symptoms?

**Chronic hypertension and gestational hypertension** often have no obvious symptoms. Many people do not feel sick.

**Preeclampsia** often has symptoms that occur suddenly. Some warning signs may include:

- A headache that will not go away
- Changes in eyesight, including seeing spots or blurry vision
- Pain in the upper right side of your stomach or right shoulder
- Severe nausea or vomiting
- Puffiness in hands or face
- Swelling of legs and feet
- Fast weight gain – gaining 3-5 pounds in a week
- Trouble breathing
- Dizziness
- Protein in your urine – identified when your health care provider tests your urine

**Postpartum preeclampsia** is a rare condition that can occur up to 6 weeks after birth. It can have the same symptoms listed above.

Report **any** symptoms to your health care provider as soon as possible.

Always go to your health care visits, as some people may not have or notice the symptoms of high blood pressure or preeclampsia. During your health care visit, your HCP may check your blood pressure and the levels of protein in your urine. It is also important to discuss your current salt intake with your HCP and decide whether it is safe to reduce that amount while pregnant.

**There are many ways to help you have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby.** Check the positive steps you are already taking and the ones you plan to start.

I do this	I will start doing this	Positive Steps
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I keep all my health care visits.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I know if I am at risk and watch for signs of preeclampsia.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I eat well-balanced meals and snacks throughout the day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in my meals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I eat different types of protein (such as eggs, fish, beans, peas, lean meat, and poultry).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I choose most of my grains as whole grains (like oatmeal or whole wheat bread).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I drink at least 6-8 glasses of water each day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I get enough rest by sleeping 8-10 hours a day.
<b>When appropriate as suggested by your health care provider:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I check my blood pressure regularly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I take my medications as prescribed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am active at least 30 minutes a day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I follow my health care provider's advice.

**Be sure to tell your health care provider if you have any symptoms.**

## After you have your baby:

- Monitor your blood pressure
- Follow your health care provider's advice
- Continue to eat healthy foods, be active, and maintain a healthy weight
- Go to all your health care visits and see your HCP at least yearly for blood pressure monitoring

*This handout is for general informational purposes.*

**Contact your health care provider or nutritionist at WIC for more information.**

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