

High Blood Pressure in Pregnancy

Blood pressure is the force put on the walls of your blood vessels as blood travels through your body. Blood pressure helps pump blood to your body.

Taking your blood pressure

Blood pressure is often checked by putting a wide band, called a cuff, around your upper arm. Air is pumped into the cuff. Your blood pressure is measured as the air is let out of the cuff.

Blood pressure is one number over a second number. You may hear your doctor say 110 over 72 (110/72), for example.

- The top number is higher and is called the systolic reading. It is the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart pumps.
- The bottom number is lower and is called the diastolic reading. It is the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart rests between beats.

Normal blood pressure

Normal blood pressure is a top number less than 120 (systolic) and a bottom number less than 80 (diastolic).

Blood pressure varies from person to person. Each person's blood pressure changes from hour to hour and from day to day.

High blood pressure

High blood pressure is also called hypertension. High blood pressure is 130 or higher over 80 or higher. There are different stages of high blood pressure, based on how high your numbers are.

A diagnosis of high blood pressure is not made until your blood pressure is checked several times and it stays high.

High blood pressure and pregnancy

High blood pressure can be dangerous for pregnant women and their unborn babies. Women with high blood pressure before pregnancy may have more problems during pregnancy.

Some women get high blood pressure while they are pregnant. High blood pressure during the second half of the pregnancy is called gestational hypertension.

Without treatment, high blood pressure during pregnancy can cause a small or ill baby and problems for the mother.

Signs of high blood pressure in pregnancy

The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it checked. Most people do not have any signs.

Your care

If you have high blood pressure:

- Check your blood pressure often.
- Go to your regular doctor visits to check you and your baby.
- Take your blood pressure medicine as ordered by your doctor. Take your medicine even if you feel well.
- Limit salt intake.
- Exercise most every day.
- Get plenty of rest. Lie on your left side to give your baby the most oxygen. Ask for help if you work or have other small children.
- Reduce stress.

Gestational hypertension

Your doctor will check your health during pregnancy to watch for gestational hypertension. Gestational hypertension can progress to pre-eclampsia or eclampsia. This can affect the placenta, and the mother's kidneys, liver and brain.

Signs of preeclampsia

- Headache
- Heartburn
- Blurred vision or seeing spots
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain in the upper right side of the stomach

If you have high blood pressure and seizures, it is called eclampsia.

Treatment for gestational hypertension may include lowering your blood pressure with bed rest or medicines, a hospital stay or delivery of your baby.

Talk to your doctor **right away** if you have any of these signs or have any questions or concerns.