



What is Hypertension? Hypertension = “High Blood Pressure”

Blood pressure (BP) is vital for your body’s circulatory system (the heart, arteries and veins) to function. A BP reading has two numbers: the first, is the pressure in the arteries when the heart contracts [systolic], the second, is the arterial pressure when the heart relaxes [diastolic] e.g. 120/70

Blood pressure may vary with age, weight, when you are excited or if you exercise strenuously. In pregnancy, it may also vary with changes in position.



What Types of Hypertension are There ?

CHRONIC HYPERTENSION affects both men and women, is long lasting and may require treatment with medications.

GESTATIONAL HYPERTENSION is when BP is elevated only in pregnancy.

PREECLAMPSIA (pregnancy induced hypertension, PIH, toxemia) is when BP is high and there is swelling of the face, hands or feet with protein in the urine. Preeclampsia occurs in about 7% of all pregnancies.

Am I at Risk for Preeclampsia (PIH/Toxemia)?

You are at a higher risk of developing PIH if...

- Have a history of chronic hypertension or PIH in a previous pregnancy.
- This is your first pregnancy.
- Over 40 years of age.
- Are carrying more than one baby.
- Have certain medical conditions such as diabetes or kidney disease.

What are the warning signs which I should watch for ?

- A sudden weight gain of more than one pound per day.
- Swelling (edema) of the face or hands.
- Persistent leg swelling.
- Severe or constant headaches.
- Dimness or blurred vision, flashes of light or spots before your eyes.
- Sharp or prolonged pain in the right upper part of the abdomen.
- Severe abdominal pain with or without vaginal bleeding.
- Decreased fetal movement.

If You Experience Any of These Symptoms Do Not Wait Until Your Next Appointment. Call Your Physician or Nurse Immediately.

How Could Hypertension Affect My Baby?

- Hypertension during pregnancy may affect the development of your baby. The baby grows inside your uterus. On an inside wall of the uterus is the placenta which provides the blood supply with nutrients and oxygen to the baby.
- Hypertension can cause decreased blood flow to the placenta because of the constriction of maternal arteries. This can cause less nutrients and oxygen to reach the baby and growth may be slowed. Ultrasounds may be used to measure the baby's size and the amniotic fluid volume.
- Depending on the severity of the hypertension, the baby may need to be delivered pre-term and could have complications with eating, breathing or staying warm.
- Prolonged severe hypertension can cause damage of the kidneys, liver, eyes and brain. The placenta may separate from the uterus (*abruptio placenta*) resulting in vaginal bleeding. When blood builds up behind the placenta, it may eventually push it away resulting in no blood flow to the baby. This is an **obstetrical emergency!**



What can I do if I have PIH ?

If your BP is severely elevated, you will need additional blood work. You may need to be admitted to the hospital for observation or delivery.

If your BP is only slightly or moderately elevated, your best approach to PIH is to prevent it from getting too severe by following your physicians directions, including:

- Bed rest may help control your BP.
- Eat a well balanced healthy diet & drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid eating foods that have a high salt content.
- Watch for the warning signs of PIH and tell your doctor immediately if any of them appear.
- You may be asked to check your BP and weight at home and report any significant changes.
- Tell your doctor about all medications you are taking including over-the- counter ones.

“Your Blood Pressure Must Be Closely Monitored by Your Physician”

Helpful Hints....

- Plan your daily routine. This will help you feel in control.
- Ask your physician or nurse the activities in which you can participate.
- Set up your room so that items you want are within easy reach e.g. TV/VCR, remote control, books, medications, paper & pens, hobby supplies etc.
- Allow your partner, family or friends to take care of you. Let them help around the house and run errands for you.
- Keep track of your baby's activity as it can be an important indicator of well being. Your doctor may ask you to have "non-stress tests" to monitor your baby's heart rate.
- Think of staying in bed as an act of love for the baby you are carrying... after all.... your ultimate goal in pregnancy is to have a healthy baby!

