

High Blood Pressure and Pregnancy: The hidden risks you need to know

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure (BP) is the force of blood against the inside walls of your arteries. When your arteries become narrow, the pressure of the blood inside goes up. This causes high blood pressure (HBP), also called **hypertension**.

HBP is often called a “silent killer” because people usually do not have symptoms. Sometimes, very high blood pressure can cause symptoms like headaches or vision changes. When that happens, HBP is already a medical emergency.

Why is HBP in pregnancy a concern?

If you experience high blood pressure during pregnancy (including preeclampsia and eclampsia), you have a higher risk of developing HBP and heart disease in the first year after giving birth and throughout your lifetime. Left untreated, HBP increases your risk of future heart disease, including heart attack, stroke and heart failure.

Up to 4 out of 10 women will have high blood pressure long term after giving birth. Checking and tracking your blood pressure during and after pregnancy can help you avoid serious problems.



What should I watch for?

- **Call your primary care or pregnancy provider:** if your BP is higher than 140/90 or you have more leg swelling than usual.
- **Go to the ER:** if your BP is higher than 160/110, or you have headaches or vision changes.
- **Call 911:** if you faint or have a seizure, are having stroke symptoms, trouble breathing, heart palpitations, or chest pain.

How do know if my BP is high?

- Invest in a good quality blood pressure monitor that you can use at home. In most cases, you can use an FSA or HSA account to pay for it. You can find a list of reliable monitors at [validatebp.org/](https://www.validatebp.org/).



- Check your BP regularly following these general instructions:
 - 1 Sit quietly for 5 minutes before taking your BP. Wait for at least 30 minutes after eating or drinking anything with caffeine or alcohol, or after using tobacco.
 - 2 Put the cuff on your arm. Remove clothes that could get in the way.
 - 3 Follow the instructions for your monitor. Write down the date, time, your BP and pulse rate. Wait 2 minutes and do it again.

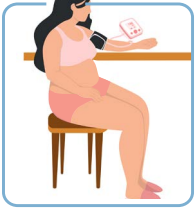
Download or ask your provider for a copy of Intermountain’s How to Check Your Blood Pressure handout. [kr.ihc.com/ckr-ext/Dcmnt?ncid=522591328](https://www.kr.ihc.com/ckr-ext/Dcmnt?ncid=522591328)



Download or ask your provider for a copy of Intermountain’s Blood Pressure Tracker, or choose a similar online app. [kr.ihc.com/ckr-ext/Dcmnt?ncid=51061889](https://www.kr.ihc.com/ckr-ext/Dcmnt?ncid=51061889)



What can I do?



Check your BP daily for the first days after delivery, then at least once a week, even if your blood pressure is normal (less than 130/80). Use a good quality BP cuff and know how to use it correctly. (See the instructions on page 1.)



Keep a diary. Write down your BP readings in a booklet or app to share with your primary care provider (PCP), your pregnancy provider, (OB) and any other healthcare provider you are seeing. If needed, you may be eligible for remote monitoring with your clinical team. Ask your care team.



Follow-up. Tell your care team, including your PCP, and OB, if you have a history of high blood pressure, preeclampsia, or eclampsia during any pregnancy. If your blood pressure at home is averaging greater than 130/80, talk with your provider about options. You may need medication to lower your future risk.



Get long-term care. Keep seeing your PCP, OB, or cardiologist (heart doctor) to manage your BP and reduce the risk of heart problems. Take your medications as prescribed and tell your care team if you have any issues with your medications.



Know your numbers. Track your cholesterol, blood sugar (or HbA1c) so you can manage any other health conditions you may have. Regularly check your blood pressure and report it if it is high.



Healthy lifestyle. Follow the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan, exercise for at least 30 minutes daily, get enough sleep, limit alcohol, avoid recreational substances, and don't smoke or vape.

My follow-up appointment

Date / Time: _____

Place: _____

Doctor: _____

Where can I learn more?

Check out the following resources to learn more about HBP in pregnancy:

- American Heart Association: [heart.org](https://www.heart.org)
- MedlinePlus: [medlineplus.gov](https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus)
- CardioSmart: [cardiosmart.org](https://www.cardiosmart.org)
- American Stroke Association: [stroke.org](https://www.stroke.org)
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: [nhlbi.nih.gov](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)
- Preeclampsia Foundation: [preeclampsia.org](https://www.preeclampsia.org)