

Preeclampsia

Signs, Symptoms, & Treatment

If you are pregnant, you need to know the signs and symptoms of preeclampsia and work with your doctor to take action if you have it. Preeclampsia is serious, but regular checkups during pregnancy can help manage the condition and protect yourself and your baby.

What is preeclampsia?

Preeclampsia is a serious condition that only occurs during pregnancy or shortly after your baby is born. Preeclampsia causes high blood pressure and can cause damage to organs, like the kidney and liver. It is very important to manage preeclampsia to prevent it from turning into eclampsia, which can be life-threatening to you and your child.

Preeclampsia happens in about 5% to 8% of pregnancies, almost always after the 20th week of pregnancy. While doctors do not know what causes preeclampsia, they can monitor and, if necessary, provide treatment.

Signs and symptoms to watch for

In early preeclampsia, you may not notice any symptoms, but there are telltale signs your doctor will look for, including:

- High blood pressure
- Rapid weight gain (2-5 lbs. a week)
- Excess protein in your urine
- Swelling of the hands and face

Later stages of preeclampsia can cause many health complications, including:

- Bad headache
- Pain on the right side of your body
- Belly pain
- Urinating less often

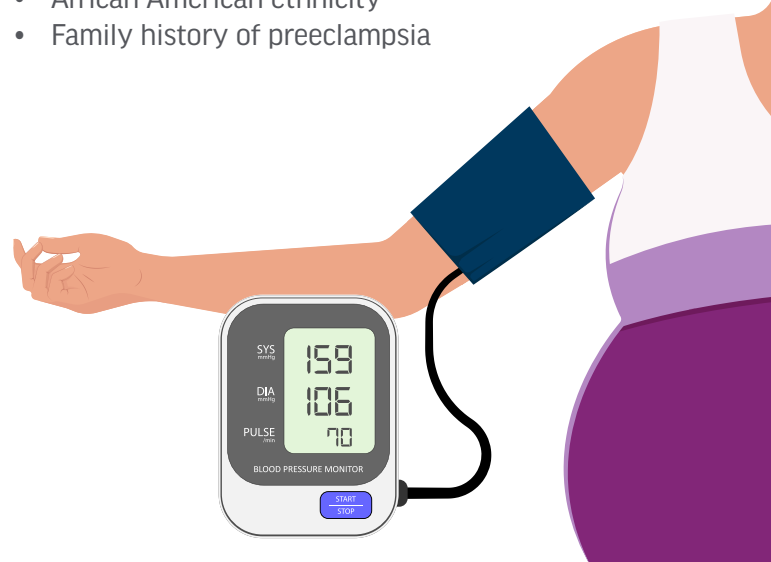
- Seizures
- Dizziness
- Impaired vision
- Kidney or liver damage

Preeclampsia diagnosis

Preeclampsia is usually diagnosed during a routine prenatal visit. It is important to go to all of your prenatal doctor visits. At each prenatal visit, you'll be weighed, and your blood pressure will be taken. High blood pressure is often the first sign of a problem.

If you are at high risk for preeclampsia, you may get other tests, such as blood tests and a test to check for protein in your urine. Factors that can increase your risk include:

- High blood pressure or preeclampsia in an earlier pregnancy
- High blood pressure or kidney disease before pregnancy
- Obesity
- Age (women older than 40 are at higher risk)
- Multiple gestation (twins or triplets)
- African American ethnicity
- Family history of preeclampsia



If tests suggest that you have preeclampsia, your doctor will test you regularly for the rest of your pregnancy and closely watch your baby's health. They may ask you to come in for testing more often.

Treatment

For mild preeclampsia, you'll go to your doctor's office often for tests and to check on your baby's health. Your doctor may show you how to check your blood pressure at home. Watch carefully for signs of more severe preeclampsia, such as a terrible headache, dizziness, or vision changes. If your preeclampsia gets worse, your doctor may prescribe bed rest, meaning you will be limited in activity in order to keep your baby safe.

If it is a severe case, you may need to stay at the hospital, where your medical team can closely monitor you and your baby. Your doctor may prescribe medicine to lower your blood pressure and prevent seizures. You may also get medicine to help prepare your baby's lungs for birth. Your doctor will try to deliver your baby when your baby has grown enough to be ready for birth, but sometimes early delivery is needed to protect your health and your baby. If this happens, your baby will get special care for premature babies.

Preeclampsia after your baby is born

Preeclampsia often goes away after delivery. However, some women develop preeclampsia or eclampsia after they deliver their babies. Because postpartum preeclampsia and eclampsia can progress quickly and have serious effects, it is important to get treatment immediately if you experience headaches, vision changes, nausea, or abominable pain, especially in the first few days after giving birth.

Resources & Support

Community First offers expectant moms resources and support through our Healthy Expectations Maternity Program. To join, please visit [CommunityFirstHealthPlans.com/Health-and-Wellness-Programs](https://www.communityfirsthealthplans.com/Health-and-Wellness-Programs) to take our Pregnancy Health Assessment, call 210-358-6055, or email healthyhelp@cfhp.com.

Sources

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preeclampsia/conditioninfo/risk>

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preeclampsia/conditioninfo/treatments>

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