

# Hypertension in Pregnancy and Pre-eclampsia

## What is it?

Hypertension in pregnancy and pre-eclampsia are health concerns that can affect pregnant women at any stage.

- **Hypertension** is high blood pressure. This is when your blood pressure reading is more than 140mmHg/90mmHg.
- **Pre-eclampsia** is a form of high blood pressure which happens during pregnancy. It mostly happens after 20 weeks and needs urgent treatment.

It is important to get treatment for both conditions quickly. Treatment can help lower the chances of severe illness for both pregnant women and their babies. If you have either of these health concerns, your healthcare team will monitor you very closely throughout the rest of your pregnancy.

## What will my GP do now?

Your GP will tell you how to manage high blood pressure.

This may involve things like:

- Frequent blood pressure checks, along with blood and urine tests
- Frequent checks on your baby's health and heartbeat
- Going to a special clinic for pregnant women with high blood pressure
- Taking a pregnancy safe blood pressure medication

If your blood pressure is very high, your GP may refer you to your local birthing unit or emergency department. For some women, the only way to treat pre-eclampsia is to have the baby early.

## What will my GP do in the future?

While you are pregnant, your GP will do frequent checks of your blood pressure. After you leave hospital after the birth of your baby, your GP will continue to see you often and check your blood pressure.

Your GP may slowly lower the dose of your blood pressure medication. You may be able to stop taking it after a few months. Some women need to continue to take it for many months or years.

You may also have a greater chance of developing pre-eclampsia in the future if you become pregnant again. Your GP will talk to you about this.

## What can I do?

There are a number of things you can do to manage your condition, including:

- Attend all your health check-ups
- Tell your GP if you've had high blood pressure in the past
- Tell your GP if you took blood pressure medication before you became pregnant
- Rest and drink plenty of clear fluids (enough to keep your wee a pale yellow colour)

Tell your GP or midwife right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- Very bad headaches that do not go away
- Vision problems, such as blurred vision, flashing lights or spots in your eyes
- Strong pain in the upper part of the tummy just below your ribs
- Sudden swelling or puffy hands, face or feet
- Sudden weight gain due to fluid build-up
- Heartburn that doesn't go away with antacids
- Feeling very unwell
- Not being able to feel your baby move as much

### Swelling

**Swelling is common in pregnancy and rarely a sign of pre-eclampsia.**

**Tell your GP or midwife right away of any sudden changes to swelling in your hands, face or feet.**

## What supports are available?

For people at risk, there are special clinics across the South Western Sydney Local Health District. Your GP can refer you to:

- Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital Renal Obstetrics Clinic or Hypertensive Clinic
- Campbelltown Hospital Antenatal Clinic – Hypertension in Pregnancy Clinic
- Liverpool Hospital Antenatal Clinic – Hypertensive/Renal Disorders of Pregnancy Clinic

## What questions could I ask my doctor?

How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

Do I need medications?

Are there any side effects of these medications?

What symptoms should I be worried about?

Will my high blood pressure affect my baby?

Where can I get more help?



## Where can I learn more?

- **Patient.info** – High blood pressure in pregnancy: [patient.info](http://patient.info)
- **Better Health Channel** – Pre-eclampsia: [betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- **The Royal Women's Hospital** – High blood pressure and preeclampsia: [thewomens.org.au](http://thewomens.org.au)
- **Healthdirect Australia** – Pre-eclampsia: [healthdirect.gov.au](http://healthdirect.gov.au)