

Blood pressure is the force of the blood against blood vessel walls when the heart beats and rests. If your blood pressure stays too high, it is called **hypertension**.

It is important to treat high blood pressure because it can lead to **heart attack, stroke, heart failure, kidney damage, blindness, and other medical problems**. Even young women can have these problems due to high blood pressure.

If you become pregnant and have high blood pressure, it may decrease the oxygen and nutrients that your baby gets. High blood pressure during pregnancy can create serious problems for both mother and baby, including:

- Health problems for the mother, such as heart attack and stroke
- Slow growth for the baby during the pregnancy and low birth weight when the baby is born
- Higher chance of having a baby too early (preterm birth)
- Risk of your placenta (afterbirth) pulling away from the uterine wall during labor and/or delivery; this can cause heavy bleeding and shock, and is dangerous for both mother and baby

The good news is that with proper care, **serious problems from high blood pressure may be prevented**. In fact, most women with high blood pressure can have healthy pregnancies.

What You Can Do:

Talk with your doctor about how to get your blood pressure to normal levels.

- Check your blood pressure regularly. The normal blood pressure range of people between 20-40 years of age is 120/80. Blood pressure can vary by age and time of day
- Use diet and exercise to be at a healthy weight
- Take your blood pressure medicine as prescribed
- If you are on high blood pressure medicine, ask if it is the right medicine to take if you get pregnant or plan to become pregnant
- Quit smoking. Smoking damages blood vessel walls. It is most dangerous for people with high blood pressure

If you are pregnant:

- Meet with your doctor early in your pregnancy
- Talk to your doctor about what medicines you are taking and take all medicines that are prescribed to you
- Continue to eat healthy and exercise
- Go to all your prenatal appointments
- Check your blood pressure and weight at home and discuss it with your doctor or nurse

Health Care Provider Instructions:

My Next Steps:

Remember:

- Half of all pregnancies are not planned
- Birth defects can occur before you even know that you are pregnant
- Your baby's health is strongly linked to your own health
- If you are healthy, your baby has a better chance of being healthy too

Whether or not you are planning to become pregnant, it is important to follow these guidelines:

- Take a multivitamin with 400-800 micrograms of folic acid every day
- Ask your doctor about your risk of diabetes (high blood sugar), high blood pressure, and thyroid disease
- Stop smoking, drinking alcohol, and taking illegal drugs
- If you take medicine, talk to your doctor to make sure it is safe for pregnancy, otherwise make sure to take steps to avoid pregnancy
- Have a Well Woman exam every year
- If someone else is hurting you, call **the National 24 hour Domestic Violence Hotline at: 1-800-799-7233 or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY for the Deaf)** and tell someone that you trust
- Eat healthy foods and do something active every day
- Stay at a healthy weight

Resources:

Content adapted from March of Dimes - www.marchofdimes.com
American Heart Association - <http://www.americanheart.org>

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