Preeclampsia-After Delivery

Information for Postpartum Care, Future Pregnancy and Long-Term Health.

What Is Preeclampsia?

Preeclampsia is a disease that occurs during pregnancy or soon after delivery involving high blood pressure plus other health issues, such as protein in the urine, liver problems or blood clotting issues. In severe cases, it may cause seizure, stroke, kidney failure or other serious complications. Preeclampsia affects about 4% of all pregnancies (one out of every 25).

What Causes Preeclampsia?

The exact cause of preeclampsia is unknown. However, it is not your fault. For most people diagnosed with preeclampsia, there was nothing they did to cause it and nothing they should have done to try to prevent it.

The primary treatment for preeclampsia is delivery. Blood pressure, kidney function and liver function usually return to normal in the days or weeks following the delivery of your baby.

When Should I Have a Follow-Up Visit After Going Home?

Blood pressure can rise again after you go home from the hospital. For this reason, it is essential to see your obstetrician within a few days.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends a follow-up visit:

- Within three days of going home, if you had severe high blood pressure
- Within seven to 10 days of going home, if you did not have severe high blood pressure

The purpose of the follow-up visit is to review your blood pressure and any other symptoms you might be having. Medications may be adjusted, and additional follow-up may be suggested during your visit. This can be a “telemedicine” video visit if you monitor your blood pressure at home.

Are There Warning Signs of Post-Delivery Preeclampsia?

Call your doctor’s office right away or seek emergency care if you have any of the following symptoms that may signal that preeclampsia has returned:

- Severe headache or a headache that doesn’t go away
- Vision problems (blind spots, blurred vision, double vision)
- Unexplained pain in your upper belly
- Unexplained shortness of breath
- Blood pressure 160 (upper number) or 110 (lower number) or higher

Will Preeclampsia Happen Again in Future Pregnancies?

Up to one in three women with preeclampsia will get it again during the next pregnancy.

Is There Anything Special I Should Do During My Next Pregnancy?

Current recommendations for future pregnancies in people who have had preeclampsia include:

- Low-dose aspirin — Reduces the chance of getting preeclampsia again.
- Lab testing to check your kidney and liver functions early in your pregnancy.
- Ultrasounds to check the growth of the fetus (unborn baby) during the third trimester (last few months of pregnancy).
- Be alert to warning symptoms that may signal that preeclampsia is developing and discuss these with your care provider right away or seek urgent medical attention:
    - Severe or persistent headache
    - Trouble with vision (blind spots, blurred vision, double vision)
    - Unexplained pain in your upper belly
    - Swelling of hands or face
    - Blood pressure over 140 (upper number) or 90 (lower number) or persistent increase above your normal pressure

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- Your prenatal care provider may recommend a consultation with a maternal-fetal medicine specialist (high-risk obstetrician) to discuss an individual care plan for you.

Does Preeclampsia Affect My Long-Term Health?

For most people, blood pressure returns to normal and other problems resolve in the days or weeks after delivery.

However, even though it looks like the disease has gone away, people who have had preeclampsia have a higher chance of developing several diseases later in life. These may occur right away, a few years later or even many decades later, including:

- High blood pressure
- High triglycerides (fat) in the blood
- Low HDL levels (good cholesterol)
- High blood sugar (prediabetes)
- Weight gain (obesity)

It is called metabolic syndrome if you have three or more of these. People with metabolic syndrome are at high risk for diabetes and heart disease.

Healthy lifestyle choices reduce the chances of getting metabolic syndrome:

- Maintain healthful diet
- Maintain a healthy weight (BMI between 21 and 25)
- Moderate exercise 30 minutes five times a week (even light walking is better than nothing!)
- Stop smoking or vaping tobacco or nicotine products

ACOG recommends screening yearly for metabolic syndrome for people who have had preeclampsia. This includes checking the following:

- Blood pressure
- Weight
- Lab tests for cholesterol, triglycerides and diabetes

It is important to let your primary care doctor know that you have had preeclampsia, so you receive appropriate screening.

Additional Resources:

American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists
acog.org/womens-health/faqs/heart-health-for-women

acog.org/womens-health/faqs/preeclampsia-and-high-blood-pressure-during-pregnancy

Centers for Disease Control
cdc.gov/hearher/maternal-warning-signs/index.html

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