

When blood pressure rises during pregnancy

Pregnant women at risk of preeclampsia should look out for these warning signs, says Dr Candice Wang

In the National Population Health Survey 2020 by the Ministry of Health and Health Promotion Board, over one in three Singapore residents aged 18 to 74 suffers from high blood pressure.

The condition is of greater concern in pregnant women as severe hypertension may be life threatening to both mother and baby. Dr Candice Wang from Mount Alvernia Hospital's Obstetrics and Gynaecology department shares more.

Q How do I know if I have hypertension during pregnancy?

A healthy person's blood pressure is lower than 120/80 mmHg. If your blood pressure is persistently higher than 140/90 mmHg with high levels of protein in the urine after 20 weeks of pregnancy, you have what is known as preeclampsia.

Q How will hypertension in pregnancy be diagnosed?

Your doctor should take your blood pressure and test your urine for protein at your regular check-ups.

If there is any suspicion of preeclampsia, additional blood and urine tests will be performed. The baby will be monitored more closely with ultrasound scans to check for any growth restriction. The risk factors for preeclampsia include:

- Being 40 years and older
- First pregnancy
- Preeclampsia in a previous pregnancy
- Family history of preeclampsia
- Having the last pregnancy over a decade ago
- Existing high blood pressure
- Medical conditions such as kidney problems, diabetes or autoimmune diseases
- Being pregnant with twins or triplets
- Having a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 35 or more



Monitor your blood pressure regularly during pregnancy to catch hypertension early. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Q How will hypertension affect the mother and baby?

Mild preeclampsia usually has little effect on the mother and baby. However, medical studies state that one in 200 pregnant women may progress to severe preeclampsia. This may present one or more of the following symptoms:

- Persistent and painful headache
- Blurry vision
- Abdominal pain on the right, just below the ribs
- Swelling of the hands and legs over a short period of time

It can also affect the mother's liver and kidneys, or cause blood clotting or fits, while the baby may have stunted growth or even die.

Q What are some ways to manage hypertension during pregnancy?

The doctor will prescribe medication to lower your blood pressure. For severe preeclampsia, intravenous medication will be given to reduce the incidence of fits. Intramuscular injections will also be given to the mother to help with the baby's lung maturation in preterm cases.

The most ideal treatment for severe preeclampsia is delivery. For pregnant women at 37 weeks and after, they will be given the option to induce labour. Elective caesarean sections may be brought forward.

It is also important to monitor the mother's blood pressure after delivery as fits may still occur.



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