

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW **ABOUT PREECLAMPSIA?**

Information for every pregnant woman



Preeclampsia

What is preeclampsia?

Preeclampsia is a disorder that occurs during pregnancy and the post-partum period (after the birth) which affects the pregnant woman and her baby.

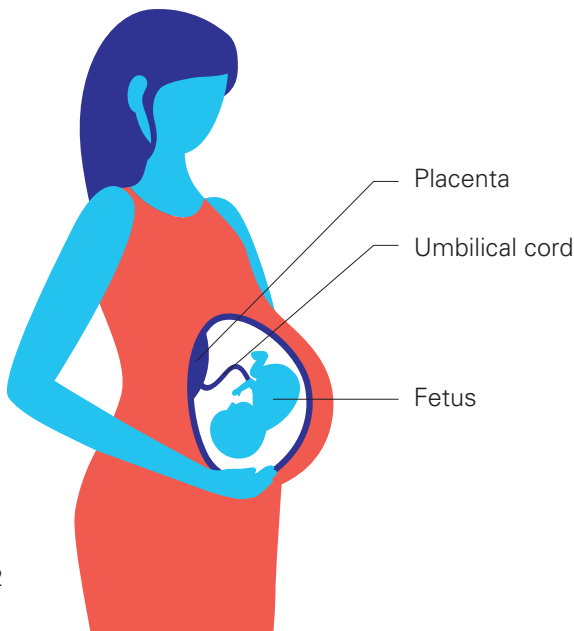
Preeclampsia affects 5 pregnancies in every 100. This represents about 300 births per annum at the HUG Maternity.

Preeclampsia is an abnormal increase in blood pressure which damages

- ▶ the organs of the pregnant woman
or
- ▶ slows down the baby's growth.

Preeclampsia is connected with the placenta, the organ responsible for exchanges between the baby (fetus) and the pregnant woman.

Preeclampsia generally manifests in the second half of the pregnancy period (after 20 weeks). It may also occur during birth and up to six weeks after the birth.



Preeclampsia is an illness of pregnancy linked to the placenta.
It's not your fault!

What can increase the risk of preeclampsia?

Preeclampsia can affect all pregnant women.

You are at a higher risk than others if:

- ▶ you have a health problem such as diabetes, a kidney disease, high blood pressure, an auto-immune disease (lupus, polyarthritis) or obesity
- ▶ you have been affected by preeclampsia previously
- ▶ your mother or sister had preeclampsia
- ▶ you have had a medically assisted reproduction (MAR, IVF)
- ▶ it is a pregnancy with twins or triplets.

What are the recommended screening tests?

The risk of preeclampsia is assessed in the first trimester of pregnancy with:

- ▶ a blood test
- ▶ an ultrasound scan
- ▶ a blood pressure measurement.

Warning signs of preeclampsia are then checked at each medical appointment or by midwives. Blood pressure is measured and urine is checked for proteins. The baby's growth is also monitored.



Blood test



Ultrasound scan



Blood pressure measurement



Proteins in urine

How to reduce the risk of preeclampsia?

- ▶ eat a balanced and healthy diet
- ▶ avoid overweight
- ▶ maintain a physical activity appropriate for pregnancy
- ▶ do not smoke
- ▶ if you have a chronic health problem it is important to control it properly for the duration of the pregnancy.

In some cases you may be recommended to take low doses of aspirin from the first trimester of the pregnancy.

Preeclampsia complications include:

- ▶ eclampsia: this is an attack on the brain with convulsions (like epilepsy)
- ▶ HELLP syndrome: this is an attack on the liver and the blood with an anemia (reduction in red blood cells) and a reduction in platelets (the blood elements necessary for clotting)
- ▶ other complications are also possible, discuss this with your doctor.

What are the risks of preeclampsia for the baby?

The baby's growth may be slowed down. There is a risk of premature birth if preeclampsia occurs before the due date of the birth.

+ INFO

It's normal for blood pressure to vary from one measurement to the next. If blood pressure is high it is not necessarily due to stress. If blood pressure is high it could perhaps be due to preeclampsia.

How do I know if I have preeclampsia?

The warning signs for preeclampsia differ from one pregnancy to another. They do not all appear at the same time.

These are the warning signs you must pay attention to:

- ▶ Increased blood pressure measured on the pressure device that is new or repeated
 - more than 140/90 mmHg: consult your doctor, your midwife or the Maternity Emergency
 - more than 160/110 mmHg: consult the Maternity Emergency
- ▶ a general malaise that is difficult to explain
- ▶ a continuous or unusual headache
- ▶ rapid water retention (edemas) with:
 - unusual swelling of the feet and ankles, hands or face
 - a weight gain of more than 1kg per week
- ▶ ringing in the ears on both sides
- ▶ a vision problem: blurred vision, flashes of light, specks before the eyes
- ▶ the return of nausea or vomiting which is unusual at the end of the pregnancy
- ▶ severe and continuous pains at the top of the stomach (different from contractions)
- ▶ difficulty breathing
- ▶ severe chest pains
- ▶ a crisis of convulsions like epilepsy (eclampsia).

Do you have the warning signs of preeclampsia?

- ▶ Contact your midwife or your gynecologist!
- ▶ Contact the Maternity Emergency: they are there to welcome, orient and assist you.

What is the treatment for preeclampsia?

Each occurrence of preeclampsia is unique! Your doctor will recommend the best treatment for you and your baby.

When preeclampsia is confirmed, closer monitoring is required, often in hospital.

The birth of the baby and the removal of the placenta generally stops the progression of preeclampsia. Birth is sometimes necessary before the due date. Your doctor will discuss with you the time and mode of birth based on your particular situation.

Medication may be administered to reduce blood pressure.

Medication may be administered to protect against convulsions (magnesium).

In some cases preeclampsia may occur after birth. The same medication is administered to reduce blood pressure and protect against convulsions.

Is breastfeeding possible after preeclampsia?

Yes breastfeeding is possible. The prescribed treatments are without risk for the baby.

Is a second pregnancy possible after preeclampsia?

There is no contraindication to considering a new pregnancy after preeclampsia. The risk of having preeclampsia again exists and should be discussed with your doctor. It is important to prepare for this new pregnancy.

A test should be carried out in the first trimester to predict the risk of preeclampsia.

Taking low doses of aspirin from the first trimester of pregnancy is proposed when the risk of preeclampsia is high.

+ INFO

Preeclampsia may affect your health several years after you have given birth. Talk to your family doctor about it!

What must I be alert to after having had preeclampsia?

After preeclampsia the risk of developing heart or vessel disease (high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke), kidney disease or diabetes is higher than for a woman having had a pregnancy without preeclampsia.

To protect yourself from these diseases, you should undergo an annual medical examination with your doctor in which your blood pressure, weight, sugar and cholesterol in the blood will be measured.

What are the recommendations following preeclampsia?

- ▶ control your blood pressure
- ▶ eat a healthy balanced diet
- ▶ reduce your salt intake
- ▶ avoid overweight
- ▶ reduce your alcohol consumption
- ▶ do not smoke
- ▶ undertake a regular physical activity (5 times 30 minutes per week)
- ▶ If you are feeling sad or are experiencing difficult emotions, talk to your close family and friends or to your doctor!



Thank you

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Warning signs of preeclampsia during and after pregnancy



Difficulty breathing



Continuous headache



General malaise



Problems with vision



Convulsions



Nausea



Ringing in the ears



Pains at the top of the stomach



Rapid weight gain



Water retention or swelling



High blood pressure
